WORDS AND WAYS;

OR,

WHAT THEY SAID, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

BY

SARAH J. JONES.

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PHILLIPS & HUNT.
CINCINNATI:
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PART I.

THE BOYS AND GIRLS OF PLAINVILLE.

WORDS AND WAYS.

CHAPTER I.

KNOW THYSELF.

"Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness."—Prov. xx, 6.

"Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift *is like* clouds and wind without rain."—Prov. xxv, 14.

AUGUSTA CLARK came hurrying in from school, looking warm and excited as she swung her strap of books.

"O mamma, we are going to get up a Talking Society—I and Sally Hyde and Lucy Bell!" she exclaimed.

"Are you?" asked her mother, quietly.

"Better organize a Keeping Silence Society; there is too much talking in Plainville now," suggested Brother Arthur from behind the curtain, where he was reading.

"O, this is for the purpose of correcting all bad talking," answered Augusta. "Mr. Henry preached about 'The Little Foxes,' in his children's sermon yesterday, and he said a good deal about the evils of the tongue, and so we thought we would see what we

can do. Lydia Jennings is always saying spiteful, disagreeable things, and Jack Robinson is always teasing, and Georgie Nelson uses slang, and, O, there are ever so many others who need to set a watch over 'the unruly member,' as Mr. Henry called it. There are Kate Harvey and Burton Bell and —"

"Augusta Clark," supplemented the voice from behind the curtain.

"Now, Arthur, you know better," retorted Augusta, somewhat disconcerted. "I don't lie, nor swear, nor snub people to their faces, nor—"

"Talk about them behind their backs?" queried the voice. Augusta was nearly ready to cry with vexation, and her mother did not come to her assistance, as she sometimes did when Arthur teased her. She hesitated for a moment, and then went on, ignoring the interruption,

"Nor use slang, nor speak disrespectfully to old people!" she concluded, triumphantly.

"'Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips,'" came the voice of the unseen monitor.

Augusta, as you have already seen, was herself by no means free from faults, and now she grew so angry that she threw her strap of books violently at the curtain which shielded her brother, and then rushed out of the parlor and up to her own room. Her anger and humiliation were so great that she did not go down when the tea-bell rang; and when Margaret

came to call her she said that her head ached, and she did not wish for any supper. She indulged in a hearty fit of crying, and thought she was a very badly used individual indeed.

After a while, when her anger and pride had somewhat spent their violence, she bathed her face and brushed her hair and sat down by the open window. She felt a little repentant for her conduct as she saw Arthur at work on the grand new swing which he had promised to make for her. She began to think that big brothers were not wholly nuisances after all, as she had declared to herself in her anger a little while before. The sun was setting, and a golden glow from the west rested like a smile on the garden beneath her window, lighting up the picture, and deepening the softened feeling that was beginning to assert itself in her heart, as she watched the busy worker who was working for her pleasure.

And now she remembered a great many things which contradicted her hasty judgment. But a moment later her mother tapped at her door, and the sight of her brought back a vivid recollection of her recent humiliation like a wave which swept away all her better feelings.

Mrs. Clark looked grave instead of smiling on her daughter as usual, and Augusta sullenly turned away her head and looked out of the window again.

Her mother sat down near her, and waited for a few moments. Then she said: "I am sorry that my little

girl has so sadly given way to a temper which I had hoped she was trying to control."

Augusta stubbornly remained silent.

"We should be willing to see our own faults as well as the faults of others," continued Mrs. Clark. "But I have not time to talk much with you now. I must go and get Arthur's valise ready, for he is obliged to go to New York this evening for Mr. Gage."

"I wish he would go to New York and stay there! Then may be I *could* control my temper, and have some peace besides," exclaimed Augusta, as her mother went out. A little later she heard Arthur himself coming up the stairs, three steps at a time, and, following the suggestion of the evil spirit which had taken possession of her, Augusta hastily fastened her door.

When Arthur found that he was locked out, he blew a long whistle, a demonstration which his sister especially disliked, as he frequently used it when she was in what he called "one of her tantrums."

Then he said: "Come now, Gussie, make friends and tell a fellow good-bye. May be I'll never come back again."

"I hope you never will!" answered Augusta, through the key-hole, the demon of pride and anger holding her bound fast.

Arthur said no more, and a few minutes later she heard him going down stairs again. Then the angel

of love and forgiveness prompted her to go after him and confess her fault; but pride said:

"No; he ought to have apologized to me for the way in which he spoke."

And so she remained in her room, and the darkness crept in and shadowed every thing. She heard the shriek of the locomotive as the gloom grew heavier, and it sounded to her, as it had never done before, like a cry of pain.

At last Augusta threw herself on the bed, and cried herself to sleep. She did not awake again until morning, but her sleep was disturbed by troublesome dreams. She thought that her brother had indeed gone away never to return; that days and weeks and months passed, and her swing remained unfinished and her summer-house unbuilt; but, worst of all, she missed her brother's cheery face and pleasant companionship, for although Arthur was somewhat of a tease he was very kind to his sister, and she loved him dearly when she was not angry, and thought there was not another brother like him in the world. She dreamed that every one blamed her because he did not come back; that her mother's face wore always a grave, grieved look, and that her father treated her with coldness, and scarcely spoke to her.

Augusta awoke herself crying over her troubles, and was very glad to find that she had only been dreaming. But the thought came to her again and again, while she was making her toilet, "What if it

should all come true? What if Arthur should never come back? Such things had happened before, and might happen again."

When this girl of my story appeared at the breakfast table, she was really suffering from the headache which she had only imagined on the previous evening, and looked so pale and miserable that Mr. Clark petted her more than usual, and her mother, fearing that she was really ill, made her a cozy nest on the sofa by the window, and, closing the shutters, made her lie down, and fanned her.

Augusta presently said that she was better, and would get ready for school. She did feel better; her headache was passing off; but alas! she now began to feel that she had been treated very badly on yesterday, and that her mother was trying to make amends for it. Foolish, vain little Augusta! This salve for her wounded pride was very pleasant to her, and she went up stairs with a slow, languid step, feeling quite like a martyr. When she came down ready for school, and her mother asked her if she felt sure she was well enough to go, she answered plaintively that "she guessed so," and went into the parlor for her books. She found them on the window-seat beside one of Arthur's, the one which he had been reading last evening. It was one of a number of large, leather-covered volumes which Augusta was wont to call "pokey old law books" when she wished her brother to lay them aside to take her out riding,

or comply with some of the many demands which she made upon him.

The sight of the familiar binding ruffled her self-complacency a little. She took it up, and, resting it on her left arm, slowly turned over the leaves, thinking, not of the contents of the book at all, but of her dream. She wanted sorely to ask when Arthur was expected to return, but she could not bring her pride to allow her to do so after the wish which she had expressed last night.

Just at this point she came across a slip of paper which seemed to be her brother's plan for his work for the week: "Monday, Gussie's swing. New York by evening train. Return Wednesday morning."

Here Augusta stopped reading. This was all she wanted to know. Arthur would be at home to-morrow, then, and what was the use of worrying about a silly dream? So she went back to the fortress of her pride, and said to herself that she was planning to do a good thing, and Arthur had teased her and made fun of her, and her mamma had taken sides against her; and she went back to her mother's room with a very comical expression of injured innocence on her face.

Mrs. Clark smiled, in spite of herself, before Augusta's back was turned, and then sighed and looked grave as she watched her down the street.

My reader, you little know the trials and difficulties which your parents undergo in their efforts to train

you up in the right way, to fit you for usefulness and happiness.

As for Augusta, in spite of her air of wounded goodness, she went to school rather divided in her own mind as to the position which she held, whether she was an abused well-doer, or a very naughty girl who should be, and in time would be, punished for her fault.

She got through the day tolerably well, but when the morning trains both arrived, and Arthur did not appear, she thought of her dream again. Nothing seemed to go quite right, either at home or school.

Miss Maxwell reproved her for inattention in her history class, and when she was reciting her geography lesson she said that the capital of Massachusetts was New York.

The boys and girls laughed at her blunder, not knowing that she scarcely heard the question, and that the great metropolis was hardly absent from her mind all day as her dream wove its somber threads through all her waking thoughts.

But that day somehow came to an end, and so did the next, and the next, but Arthur did not come; and her mamma did look grieved as Augusta had dreamed; and her papa, though he did not treat her coldly, looked graver than usual, and he and her mother once stopped talking suddenly as soon as she came into the room where they were.

So the time passed away, and Friday evening came.

How Augusta longed to ask whether her brother was not coming back, and to beg her papa to write for him to come! Had he sailed for some foreign land? Was he staying away because she had wished that he might never return? or had something dreadful happened to him?

She spent the evening in her own room, and when she heard Lucy Bell calling her, she pretended not to hear. Lucy was her next-door neighbor, and the two girls were seldom apart for long at a time. There was a little stile on the dividing fence, under the big grape-vine, where the two held frequent meetings. Arthur called the place "the rookery," and sometimes teased the girls by pretending to try to overhear their confidential chat, while Lucy's numerous brothers and sisters frequently disturbed the interviews. Lucy was now at the spot alone, with her mind full of the "Talking Society;" but Augusta seemed to have lost all interest in the matter, and to-night she did not even go to excuse herself, for her eyes were red with weeping and she did not want to be seen. She sat at the window and watched the moon rise over the tops of the trees, and she thought that it looked at her like a reproachful face. At last she retired, but not to rest. She tossed and turned, and finally, about midnight, she fell asleep, to dream again the dream that had seemed to come so true. Mrs. Clark heard Augusta making a strange, pitiful noise, and went to her room to find her sitting up in bed,

crying and moaning as though heart-broken. It was some time before she could tell the cause of her trouble, but at last she sobbed out:

"I dreamed it again, and now I know it is true!"

"O, never mind a dream, dear," said her mother, sitting down on the side of the bed and putting her arms around the shaking form.

"Ah, but it is true," answered Augusta, chokingly. "He did not come back, and he will never come because I told him not to come."

"Poor child," said Mrs Clark, "poor, proud little girl, to make so much trouble for yourself."

She was silent for a moment, and then continued:

"Arthur will be at home to-morrow night. He wrote that papa was to tell you that he was detained, and when he should return, if you asked any thing about him; but you did not ask, Augusta."

"O mamma, I am so sorry and so glad," sobbed the little girl, her pride all broken down by her sorrow and her joy.

The confession sounded rather contradictory, but Mrs Clark understood Augusta well enough to know what it meant; so she said some soothing words to the penitent and went back to her room.

Then Augusta climbed out of bed and knelt down in the moonlight. No one heard her prayer except God and the angels, but when she crept back to her pillow it was with a feeling of deep peace and thankfulness.

Why do we not strive harder to overcome our faults, when wrong-doing invariably brings its own punishment?

The next day, while Augusta was mending a pair of gloves for her brother, Mrs. Clark asked her when the "Talking Society" was to be organized.

"O mamma, please don't say any thing about it!" exclaimed Augusta, with glowing cheeks.

"Why not? I think it is a very good plan," replied her mother, smiling in a re-assuring way.

"But Arthur—" began Augusta.

"Never mind about Arthur," answered Mrs. Clark, "he only wanted to show you your own fault, a very common one, that of seeing the failings of others quite clearly while at the same time we are blind to those which belong to ourselves. But as it is sins of the tongue which we are to consider, let us make a list of some of them, and see if you can find any of yours among them."

So Mrs. Clark wrote on a slip of paper:

"Idle words, self-praise, querulousness, exaggeration flattery, angry speech, unkind remarks, evil advice, detraction, falsehood, impure and profane language."

My reader will be glad to know that Augusta discovered and acknowledged her own remissness in regard to bridling the tongue, and also that Arthur duly returned by the evening train.

Augusta, having learned her own weakness, and having obtained strength to obey the precept, "Con-

fess your faults one to another," had taken an important step forward. But you must not suppose that she overcame her faults in a day, or that the desired reformation in speech was speedily effected in Plainville.

There is no evil that seems to spread more rapidly in a community than the unwise use of the "little member" which the apostle James calls a fire, and which he says that no man can tame.

Great as this evil is, it can be corrected by the grace of God, who is "strong to deliver and mighty to save."

Mrs. Clark proposed to Augusta that she should invite her classmates to a little gathering on the following Saturday, at which time effort could be made to secure the co-operation of all in trying to correct some of the abuses of the tongue, against which Mr. Henry had warned them, and to remind them anew of the infallible cure to which he had pointed them.

CHAPTER II.

THE TALKING SOCIETY.

"A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor *is* a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow."—Prov. xxv, 18.

THE little gathering of boys and girls in Mrs. Clark's parlor were talking freely, and, alas! I must record the fact that the conversation did not seem to foreshadow the reformation which Mr. Henry's discourse had sought to bring about, and which it was the object of this meeting to assist. Plainville was, perhaps, not worse than many other towns, in which communication degenerates into news-telling and criticism, but yet it was sadly in need of reform, as the progress of my story will show.

"Jennie King knows such a splendid new game, but I don't believe she is coming," Lucy Bell was saying. "It is growing late already," she added, after her incoherent style of speaking. "And then Jennie is such a story-teller any way."

Sally Hyde was standing near the door regaling a little circle with the story of how old Mrs. O'Connor had beaten little Will and sent him off without his breakfast; and Georgie Nelson, perched upon the

piano stool, was telling of something that was "just jolly! O, perfectly splendid! a regular daisy!"

"What is that? the baby?" asked some one on the outer edge of the group.

"Not very much," answered Georgie, making a wry face. "I was talking about my new ball club. I don't take any stock in the baby; little red-faced, pug-nosed thing!" he added, laughing.

"For shame!" exclaimed Jack Robinson, stoutly. "If we had a baby at our house I would not talk slang about it; and I wouldn't give it for all the old ball clubs that could be gotten together."

"You would very soon get over that," answered Georgie. "Every time I want to go anywhere or do any thing, that bothersome baby sets up a squall, and then I must jog the crib until her royal highness sees fit to go to sleep."

Kate Harvey was speaking in a more quiet, well-bred tone, but her hearers were listening very intently.

"I didn't hear all about it," she said, "for mamma sent me out of the room on an errand; but I heard her say something about 'his poor mother,' and Miss M'Pheters said she supposed there was no doubt that it was true."

"What was true?" asked two of the girls in a breath.

"Why something about Bob White, something about his clerkship at Uncle Rupert's, something real

bad, I suppose, from the way Miss M'Pheters spoke; stealing or something."

"O-o-o!" exclaimed the listeners.

My reader, do you remember the story of Ahimaaz, who asked Joab to let him go to King David after the great battle in which Absalom was killed? Joab answered: "Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready? But howsoever, said he, let me run." And when he had run, he could only say: "I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was."

There are many persons who are ready to give tidings before they are themselves really in possession of what they are so anxious to tell to others. Ahimaaz may have wished to prepare the king for the sad news which he was soon to hear; but the motives of the would-be news-teller are not always so praiseworthy. There are many to-day like the Athenians of old, "caring for nothing but either to tell or to hear some new thing."

Solomon, the wise man, said: "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise," and, "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding."

The talk went on, and Arthur Clark's suggestion of a "Keeping Silence Society" would have been a good one just at this time, in view of some of the remarks that were being made.

It may seem to my reader a little strange that Jenny King should have been passing the window just as Lucy Bell spoke of her as "a story-teller," and that Willy O'Connor should have come to the door, and, unobserved, stood near while Sally Hyde was calling his grandmother "a cruel old creature," and telling what she had heard about her; but just such unlooked-for things very often take place.

Jenny paused at the outer door and hesitated for a moment. It was understood that Mrs. Clark was to give the children a treat of cake and ice-cream, and that Arthur was to show them some fine stereoscopic views as a part of the afternoon's entertainment. Should she stay and get her share of the pleasure, or should she turn back and go home?

She finally decided on the latter course. As Lucy looked out of the window and their eyes met, Jenny set her head back with great dignity, and marched down the pavement, her heels ringing out on the stones like little hammers, and paying no attention to Augusta, who called to her from the window.

Then Willy O'Connor made his appearance in the door-way, and actually shook his fist at Sally Hyde, as he said:

"If you were only a boy I'd give you a good beating the next time I meet you in the street, for telling stories on my grandmother. She never whipped me in my life, and she never sent me off without my breakfast neither!"

As he turned round with red face and angry eyes, from the place in the room to which he had angrily pushed his way, there in the door stood Mrs. Clark.

Now Will was rather a timid boy with grown-up people, and in view of his late angry words and gestures he felt utterly crest-fallen. He made a dart for the door, and, shooting past the lady, in spite of her efforts to arrest him, he never stopped running until he was out of sight.

Assuredly the outlook was not promising for the success of the proposed society, and yet the need of such an organization was certainly apparent.

Mrs. Clark looked troubled as she entered the room, and Sally looked very much ashamed. Here was another one of the movers of the reform falling into the very evil proposed for reformation.

"O, Mrs. Clark!" she said, blushing, "Susan said that it was true, and she said that old Mrs. O'Connor—"

"But, my dear child," interrupted Mrs. Clark, "we must not listen to every idle report which comes within our hearing, and we should be very careful about repeating rumors. Floating stories are very often utterly untrustworthy; and do you not think that we should rather try to repress the growing tendency to gossip, than to encourage and promote it by listening to and repeating all the stories that are current?"

Sally could not trust her voice to answer, and the lady went on:

"The apostle Paul spoke of some of whom he said: 'They learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not;' and Solomon said: 'Be not a witness against thy neighbor without cause.' Unless we have some good to say of people, it is usually better to say nothing about them. But come now," continued Mrs. Clark, more cheerfully, "you can apologize to Willy and his grandmother, and be more careful in the future. Arthur wants you all to come out to the swing and the croquet ground now; and when I ring the bell, I wish you all to come into the dining-room. By the way, where is Jenny? I thought I saw her pass my window a little while ago."

It was now Lucy Bell's turn to blush and look confused.

"I am afraid she heard me say she was a story-teller," she spoke out, frankly. "She looked very angry and turned and went back toward home."

"Well, Lucy," answered Mrs. Clark, "you, too, have found out that there is a time to keep silence as well as a time to speak. I think you have all learned a good lesson on the abuse of the tongue."

As the children went out into the garden, Mrs. Clark thought sadly of the extent of the evil which she had given her hand to assist in correcting, and sent

up a prayer for a power stronger than her weakness. It was well; she little knew the wrong that had been wrought already on that sunny Saturday afternoon.

The children in Mrs. Clark's grounds were soon enjoying themselves heartily, judging by the cheerful, laughing voices that were heard from time to time; but Jenny King was angry and miserable, as from the attic window of her home, not far away, she watched the sport and thought of the treats that were to follow.

As for Willy O'Connor, he went, not to his home, but to a quiet spot among the willows by the riverside, and gave vent to his feelings in a hearty fit of weeping. This was a habit which he seldom indulged in, considering it girlish, but to-day he was too wretched to restrain his tears. Willy's mother was dead, and his father being addicted to strong drink, the boy's grandmother was his best, almost his only, friend; and to hear her spoken of in such a way was too much for his loyal love, apart from the mortification.

"I wish she was a boy, I do; I'd give her such a flogging as she would remember," he muttered.

"O beat her anyhow. I'll hold your hat," said a laughing voice, and the corresponding face of Tom Howe peered through the willows.

"Go on about your business?" answered Will angrily.

"Well, then, I'll help you to whip 'er, Will, since

you are afraid to undertake the job alone," persisted the tormenter.

"You know better than that, Tom Howe," answered Will, dashing away the tears and clenching his fists. "I wont strike a girl, but I am not afraid to whip any boy, and you will soon find it out!"

"O, I was only funning," replied the intruder, good-naturedly, "breaking the bone" of his companion's anger with a "soft word," and pushing his way through the willows.

"What is the row, any way?" he asked. Will told his grievance, and Tom said, "Pshaw! who would care for any thing so ridiculous and unreasonable? Every body knows that your grandmother is as good as gold. I wouldn't care that," snapping his fingers, contemptuously.

Will felt comforted. Tom was but a rough boy, but he knew the art of saying pleasant words when he chose to do so.

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." Prov. xxv, 11.

"Pleasant words are as a honey-comb, sweet to the soul." Prov. xvi, 24.

Tom went on his way, and Will sat down again in the same spot, but feeling less unhappy, although he was at a loss how to give an account of his absence from the party without telling his grandmother the unkind remarks which had been made about her.

He spent the afternoon wandering aimlessly about,

instead of enjoying himself and getting good, as he might have done at Mrs. Clark's; while Jenny, in the dark attic among the dust and cobwebs, grew more and more unhappy, the longer she reflected on what she had heard. She felt that the words were not only unkind, but unjust, also, and her anger rose higher and higher.

But this was not all the harm that the "unruly member" had set on foot.

"The words of a tale-bearer are as wounds;" and of such persons the wise man has said: "The beginning of the words of his mouth *is* foolishness: and the end of his talk *is* mischievous madness. Eccles. x, 13.

CHAPTER III.

WILLY O'CONNOR'S REVENGE.

"Say not thou, I will recompense evil. . . . Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me."—Prov. xx, 22; xxiv, 29.

WHEN Willy O'Connor finally went home on the afternoon of the gathering at Mrs. Clark's, his grandmother asked him how he had enjoyed himself, just as he had feared she would do, and in his desire to avoid telling her his trouble, he was betrayed into the sin of falsehood.

"O, splendid," he answered; "they had cake and ice-cream and strawberries, and I can't tell what all."

"Strawberries!" echoed his grandmother, "you must be dreaming, Willy, it is too late for strawberries, and what have you been crying about?"

Willy flushed guiltily.

"O, I got into a little row with—with one of the —the girls," he stammered, "and I was mistaken about the strawberries; it was just cake and ice-cream."

Mrs. O'Connor looked troubled. She felt sure that Willy was trying to conceal something.

"A row with one of the girls? and at Mrs. Clark's house, too! I'm ashamed of you, Willy," she said.

"O, I didn't thrash her, grandmother," assured Willy.

"I should hope not," answered the old lady. "Can't you tell me all about your trouble, my boy?"

"I don't believe I can," replied Will, his flushed cheeks getting still hotter; "but I was not to blame. Indeed, indeed, upon my honor, I was not; I could take oath that—"

"Softly, my boy," interrupted his grandmother, "you have said enough."

Willy was too much in the habit of multiplying words in the effort to prop up his statements, a habit which is very common, and is much to be deplored. A simple statement of the truth is usually all that is necessary. The multiplication of words has a tendency rather to weaken than to confirm belief, and the careless habit of appealing to Heaven for the truth of what we are saying is presumptuous and wicked. We are thus warned in the Bible:

"Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." Eccles. v, 2.

The next day was not a very happy Sabbath, and on Monday morning Willy went to school, feeling angry with himself that he "had been obliged to tell a story," as he said to himself, and harboring an uncomfortable suspicion that his grandmother had lost confidence in him.

He began to think that it would have been better to tell the whole truth. On the way he overtook Jenny King, and she asked him about the party also.

"I didn't stay," answered Will, shortly; "I didn't want to be mixed up with such a lying, tattling set, and so I came away."

Jenny discovered that she had met with a kindred spirit; so she related her grievance, and the two exchanged experiences and condoled with each other.

"I am determined to pay Lucy Bell back for talking so about me. I am bound to get even with her," said Jenny, desperately.

"You are not going to fight her, are you?" asked Will.

"Why, no," answered Jenny; "it is only boys and dogs that fight."

Willy winced a little at the association.

"But I'll tell you," continued Jenny, "Lydia Jennings says that Lucy has a key to the arithmetic, with the examples all worked out, and that is how she keeps her grade in arithmetic perfect. I am going to tell Miss Maxwell as sure as I am alive. Wouldn't you?" she asked.

Now Willy had been carefully taught the meanness of tale-bearing at school, and he hesitated for a moment.

"I don't know," he answered; "Miss Maxwell

doesn't like to have us tell of each other. May be she will find it out herself, and cut down Lucy's scholarship."

"Well, I'm determined to do something to pay her back," answered Jenny, stoutly.

Will O'Connor could not but sympathize with his companion in her wish to "get even" with one who had injured her. He was conscious of the same feeling in his own heart, and yet he knew that it was wrong. He had received a Scripture card a short time before, with the words: "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men."

He put the text away out of his mind. There was Sally Hyde standing at the door, and the sight of the girl brought her offense up afresh. He flushed angrily, and, turning away, went to the other door.

Now Sally had fully made up her mind to apologize for what she had said, and to inquire if his grandmother knew about the matter. She now flushed in her turn, and went back into the schoolroom, very uncomfortable. At recess she saw Jenny King and Lucy Bell talking amicably together, and she knew that their difficulty had been adjusted. She determined to try again; but Willy gave her no opportunity to speak to him.

On going home at noon, Willy was startled to learn that Mrs. Clark had called, and had brought him

some cake and an orange, saying that, owing to a misunderstanding, one of the girls had wounded his feelings, and he had gone away before the refreshments were served.

Willy could hardly swallow the cake, and his grandmother looked very sorry, and Willy went back to school angrier than ever both with himself and Sally Hyde. "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" He met Jack Robinson at the gate, and Jack asked him:

"How about that hide you was going to tan, Will?"

Will told him to mind his own business, and Jack, who was fond of the foolish habit of punning, repeated his remark to one of the other boys, and the laugh went round, and Will became as angry with all of them as he had been with Sally.

An unkind remark, a few hastily spoken words, a rash act, a falsehood, remorse for that falsehood, anger, revengeful feelings, all following in one train! Willy was usually a merry, fun-loving boy, and one of the first in the games which school-boys enjoy; but now he stood apart by himself and scowled at the others.

"It was in a bad humor, so it was!" called out Jack, teasingly; and Will snatched up a stone and threw it with all his might at his tormenter.

It was well that the missile did not strike Jack, or Will's troubles might have been increased in a much

larger ratio. As it was, a window was broken which he would be required to pay for.

He was glad when the bell rang and all went to their places in the school-room. The history lesson was announced, and Will at once took out his book and began to study diligently, for the double purpose of learning his lesson and driving away unpleasant thoughts.

The class was reviewing, and Miss Maxwell selected a portion each day from some part of the book, giving the pupils but little time for preparation, in order to test their memories on what they had previously committed.

Having assigned the lesson, Miss Maxwell was engaged in hearing another class, when Sally Hyde came in. She was too late to hear the lesson given out, and Miss Maxwell did not permit her pupils to leave their places or to ask her any questions during recitations.

What should she do? The history class was next in order, and there was no time to be lost. Sally was one of the best scholars in the class, very rarely failing in any of her lessons, and Will had learned accidentally that her father had promised her a handsome present if her report showed one hundred per cent. in scholarship. This thought flashed through his mind as Sally took out her book and looked across the aisle toward his desk. He was the only member of the class near enough to show her the place, and

he thought his time for revenge had come, as she whispered softly the question:

"Whose administration is it, Will?"

It was only necessary to turn the page a little to enable her to see the words, in clear capitals, "JEFFERSON'S FIRST ADMINISTRATION; but should he not rather turn the book the other way, and let her remain in ignorance, and miss her lesson and her prize, as she deserved?

The boy hesitated but a moment. With that mad act of hurling the stone at Jack Robinson had come a revulsion of feeling. He felt glad and thankful that he had missed his aim and escaped the terrible consequences that might have followed. And now, as if in answer to this new temptation, came another text: "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath. . . . Wherefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink."

Right conquered. He turned the leaf, and "*Jefferson's First Administration*" stood unvealed.

Sally gave a little nod, and whispered, "Thank you, Will," and took her book to read over the lesson.

It was but a little thing; yet the victory cost a struggle, and Will O'Connor came out of that struggle stronger and nobler for the effort. When it was over he felt that he could forgive the one who had wronged him.

So true is it in such cases that cause seems some-

times to follow effect, and a kindly act toward another will produce kindly feelings. My reader, did you ever try the remedy of a deed of disinterested kindness for hard and revengeful feelings which you felt that it was your duty to subdue?

If any one has done you an injury, and bitter thoughts are marring your happiness and prompting you to unchristlike conduct, take the Master's admonition: "Do good to them that hate you," and you will find, as in the case of the withered, helpless hand, which he commanded to be stretched forth, that strength and power are given, that the gift of healing comes with the effort to obey, and, better than all, you will find the blessedness of peace and forgiveness in your soul.

It has been said that we hate those whom we have injured; and the wise man tells us that "A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it," and so, on the other hand, we learn to love those to whom we do good as we have opportunity.

I do not think that Will O'Connor understood this very clearly, but he was conscious of the fact that, after performing that little act of good-will, he felt no further desire for revenge; and when, at recess, Sally apologized for her remarks about his grandmother, he was very ready to say:

"O, let it go; it doesn't matter. Grandmother never heard any thing about it, and that is all I care for."

It turned out that Lucy Bell did not know that there were such books as arithmetical keys in existence, and so Jenny King was spared not only the meanness of tale-telling, but the sin of bearing false witness against her neighbor. As for Lydia Jennings, we shall meet with her again in the course of our story.

CHAPTER IV.

ROBERT WHITE'S PROSPECTS.

"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips *is* wise."—Prov. x, 19.

THE morning sun was not yet visible over the tops of the hills, but the gray light was stealing over the valley and the birds were getting in tune for their songs, when Robert White kindled the fire in the stove of the tiny kitchen at home, and then hurried down to the store to open the shutters and sweep. He was not very fond of early rising, and sometimes wished that he was rich, and might sleep as long as he chose; but on this particular morning he had a fresh stimulus to effort. He expected the newly awakened day to prove a golden one in his life's calendar, and he went down the street whistling merrily.

Robert White had been errand-boy in Mr. Harvey's store, earning a mere pittance; but he was faithful in the discharge of his duties and improved his leisure time in preparing himself for something better. In due time it was discovered that he was quick at figures and quite capable of standing behind the counter. Then he was promoted, with an increase of salary; and though he still swept the store and made him-

self useful in various other ways, Mr. Harvey had been heard to say that Robert was a number-one salesman for his age.

And now he was in anticipation of a still better position. Mr. English, a gentleman from the neighboring town of Everton, had talked with him about a clerkship in his store at that place, and he was hopeful of getting it.

The fact that the new situation would enable him to make his mother, sister, and aunt far more comfortable than he had ever before been able to do, was a great inducement to make the change. Many were the golden visions of peace and plenty which the new prospect had conjured up. There were countless comforts for his mother and Aunt Jerusha, educational advantages for Lily, and books for himself, which he was hungry to read but had never been able to obtain.

The salary which had been named seemed to him a small fortune; it could be made to compass so much. He was glad that the day for the decision had come. He had referred Mr. English to his present employer, and he doubted not that his recommendation would be all that would be needed.

Robert returned home for his breakfast in a pleasurable flutter of expectation of which he was secretly a little ashamed, considering it rather weak and unmanly.

"Have you seen Mr. English?" asked his sister.

"Why no, Lil, it is not business hours yet," answered Robert, with a little air of superior wisdom; "I doubt if the old gentleman is up yet. Good-bye to broom-handles and dusters after this week!" he added, gayly, as he proceeded to wash his hands in the tin basin just outside the kitchen door.

"It is high time," responded Lily, as she brought him a fresh towel; "you deserve to get up higher on the ladder."

"There is plenty of room at the top," answered Robert, sagely quoting somebody.

"Despise not the day of small things," came their mother's quiet voice; and the words threw a little shower over the enthusiasm of Robert and Lily.

"Why, mother, you believe in climbing up, don't you?" asked Robert.

"Certainly," answered Mrs. White; "but do not set your hearts too much on the promotion until you are sure of it."

"O, I don't think there is any doubt about it," said Robert, confidently; "at least, not much doubt," he added, more thoughtfully. "Mr. Harvey is willing that I shall better myself if I can, and I am sure that he will speak a good word for me."

The ardor of the brother and sister had been dampened a little by their mother's suggestion of possible disappointment, but they soon recovered and began to discuss the future with the hopefulness of youth.

"We will take a cottage, with four rooms and a nice garden place, and we shall keep a cow and have plenty of fresh milk and butter, and mother shall have all the flowers she wants; and you, Lil, shall have the best of music teachers, and some day we shall hear of Lily White as we hear now of Jenny Lind."

Lily blushed with pleasure at the prospect which seemed not far off, and Robert continued:

"And Aunt 'Rusha shall have—"

"Don't build any air-castles for Aunt 'Rusha, my dear boy," interrupted a squeaky little voice, and presently a figure made its appearance which suited the voice exactly. A tiny old lady, not bigger than a child, with pink ribbons in her cap, and her white hair in little fluffy curls on her wrinkled forehead.

"O, but you must have a room in the castle, too, Aunt 'Rusha," answered Robert, good naturedly, as with one arm he lifted her into her chair at the breakfast table, and then proceeded to move chair and all a little nearer.

"Disappointment is the common lot of man," pursued the old lady, with an air of great dignity. Then the voices hushed, and Mrs. White asked a blessing on the food of which they were about to partake. After a brief silence at the close, Aunt 'Rusha went on:

"'All is not gold that glitters,' my children."

Lily's pretty face took on a slight expression of impatience, but Robert only laughed again.

"Just wait, Aunt 'Rusha, till I get you a pair of gold-bowed spectacles; and if they don't glitter I'll exchange them," he said, banteringly.

Aunt Jerusha's lot in life had not been one of the happiest, and she had learned to look on the dark side, and to expect it, until she had come to consider it a virtue to do so.

"Ah, when you have lived in the world as long as I have," she answered, "you will not look for diamonds among the pebbles, or for gold in the sand."

"But I am not rummaging in the sand and pebbles; I am trying to do with my might what my hands have found to do; and I expect success, and I feel that I have a right to expect it," answered the boy, earnestly, but respectfully.

The old lady shook her head as her nephew dropped another lump of sugar into her coffee-cup.

"Try to be hopeful, but not too confident," said Mrs. White's even tones. "Whether you succeed in this instance or not, we must believe that it is all for the best, since our times are in God's hands," she added, reverently.

So the subject of Robert's prospects was dropped, and the meal progressed almost in silence, for all were busy with their own thoughts. Lily was thinking rebelliously that others confidently expected to receive the good things of life, and were not disappointed, while they must submissively make up their minds to something or nothing, as the case might be.

She did not give utterance to these complaining thoughts, but she harbored them in her heart.

Robert was complacently recalling to mind the hearty commendation which he had received from Mr. Harvey, not long before, for his promptness and efficiency, and building his faith on the good name which he had earned.

Aunt 'Rusha was walking among the memories of her dead past, and mentally recounting the graves of her hopes and plans; while Mrs. White was pondering the intricate problem of human experience, so puzzling to the young, and which none of us can ever fully understand until we pass into the clearer light of the higher life, and know even as we are known.

"'Tis not in morals to command success,
But we'll do more, Sempronius: we'll deserve it,"

quoted Robert to himself, as he shut the gate behind him with a sharp little click and went back to the store. There were but few customers at this early hour, and the place seemed more than usually quiet and dull. He had spoken to his sister of business hours, but before the clock had marked the hour of nine he had begun to feel restless and impatient.

He liked Mr. Harvey, and had once thought that in getting his present position the lines had fallen to him in very pleasant places; but now the superior advantages of the prospective situation made this appear very unsatisfactory.

Robert was deep in a calculation as to how many years with Mr. English it would take to save money enough to buy a little home, when a stranger came into the store and called for some trifling article, in payment for which he laid down a silver dollar. Robert took it up hastily and deposited it in the drawer, and then, as a lady made her appearance, counted out the balance quickly, and hurried away to attend to the wishes of the new customer. She called for "jetted passamenterie," and Robert, who was sometimes puzzled over the technicalities of fashionable goods and trimmings, hesitated for a moment to collect his thoughts.

"See here, young fellow, you have cheated me in my change?" called out the man at the opposite counter. Robert flushed angrily.

"Excuse me for a moment, madam," he managed to stammer, as he turned back to the other purchaser. Counting over the pieces, he found that there was a deficit of ten cents. It was humiliating to be accused of cheating; besides, he felt certain that he had made no mistake.

"The dime has disappeared somewhere," he said, shortly. "Well, I guess we can afford to give you another," and he smiled meaningly as he produced it.

"What do you mean?" demanded the man. Robert gave him no answer, but went back to the place where the lady was waiting.

"I don't think we have the article you called for,"

he said, uncertainly. "Can I show you something else?"

The lady graciously consented, and called for different fabrics, which were taken from the shelves with alacrity and piled upon the counter, to be turned over and laid aside one after another.

Robert White was naturally impulsive and hasty, but he had cultivated the virtue of patience, and had schooled himself for his work until he was very rarely thrown off his guard; and the man, who scowled at him as he passed out of the store, was the first who could have complained of Mr. Harvey's clerk for either inaccuracy or discourtesy; yet if he had trusted less to his own strength he would have been stronger. He smilingly laid aside one thing after another, and promptly produced whatever the lady wished to examine, giving prices with great apparent good-humor. Her purchases were very limited compared with the quantities of goods which she had called for, and Robert was glad when she took her leave and gave him an opportunity to re-arrange the disordered shelves.

The currents of our lives seem sometimes to be turned by very slight circumstances, just as the course of streams is directed by the little stones that lie in the beds of the rivulets.

Mr. Harvey had risen late on this morning, and had grumbled over his coffee and cakes, at which, however, no one was greatly surprised, since this was

not uncommon. Mrs. Harvey had always a convenient scape-goat on which to lay her brother-in-law's morning ill-humor, and always said: "It is his dyspepsia, my dears," when her daughters grew restive over what they mentally styled "Uncle Rupert's breakfast bearishness."

There is no doubt that many of the short-comings which are excused by ourselves or our friends on the ground of nervousness, disordered digestion, and kindred causes, were better honestly laid to the credit, or rather discredit, of disordered tempers, impatience, and downright ill-humor.

Mr. Harvey usually imbibed a degree of good-humor with his coffee, but this morning he had "one of his bad spells," as Kate said to her sister, and they were both heartily glad when he was gone. And so it came about that he went down to the store feeling irritable and "out of sorts"—another silly, palliative name for crossness.

As he entered, a lady passed in just before him—the same one who had left a short time before. Robert was high on the step-ladder, replacing a roll of cashmere which she had examined and inquired the price of.

"I called to return a silver dollar which your clerk gave me this morning," she explained. "Mr. Allen pronounces it counterfeit."

"Any one could see that at a glance," answered the merchant, without touching the coin as it lay on

the counter, and giving the lady another in its place.

"What does this mean, White?" he asked, sternly, as the customer withdrew. Robert did not answer for a moment. He was thinking of the man from whom he had received it, and who had added insult to injury, and was blaming himself in his angry humiliation more than Mr. Harvey could have done.

When, a moment later, he descended and faced his employer, his usually pale face was flushed to the roots of his hair. It was not the blush of guilt, though it might easily be misconstrued thus by a casual looker-on. He fixed his eyes on the shining fraud for a moment, at a loss how to account for his carelessness, even to himself.

"I say, what have you to say for yourself?" repeated Mr. Harvey, angrily.

At this moment Robert heard a step behind him, and turned to see Mr. English leisurely approaching. His keen, dark eyes seemed to take in the situation at a glance—the tell-tale coin, the tell-tale blush, and the angry face of the merchant. He made a bow which seemed to include all three in his greeting, and walked into the office, accompanied by Mr. Harvey.

The conference of the two gentlemen seemed a very long one to Robert, and, indeed, it did embrace considerable time and various subjects of conversation, including railroad and mining, stock and foreign imports. But little was said of the boy,

who waited in painful expectancy in the salesroom, trying to discharge his duties as if his fate were not hanging in the balance.

At last Mr. English came out alone. He walked deliberately back and forth until Robert was at leisure, and then, in a few business-like words, informed him that he had made arrangements for supplying the vacant clerkship, of which he had spoken to him, and therefore should not need his services at present.

Robert bowed, and then, with a polite good-morning, the merchant turned and went out. Robert saw him pause for a moment on the step to consult his watch, and then turn down the street swinging his gold-headed cane.

This, then, was the awakening from the dream which he had cherished so enthusiastically. This was the end of his hopes. He felt an insane desire to smash the show-cases and break the windows and then rush away, he cared not whither.

These desperate thoughts were passing through his mind as he went hither and thither attending to his duties, and trying to appear as if nothing had happened amiss.

When his dinner hour arrived, and he turned his steps homeward, he could not realize that he had trodden the same way, a few hours before, cheerful and hopeful. It seemed a long-ago experience, the bright expectations of the morning and the chat over the breakfast table.

"Have you seen Mr. English?" was Lily's greeting, and the question made him more miserable. He told his story somehow, the bare facts of his disappointment, and felt almost angry at the look of chastened submission on his mother's face. But Aunt 'Rusha—Ah! if she had half guessed how hard it was for him to bear his trouble, she surely would not have given utterance to those words which sound so exasperating to our ears when a calamity has overtaken us:

"I told you so!"

In the excess of his disappointment, it seemed to Robert at the moment like a cry of triumph. It seemed to him in his unreasoning misery as if his "little auntie," as he often called her, had wished to have it so, and as if she were in some way the cause of his failure.

"Well, you always hope for the worst, and you have proved a true prophet!" he answered, testily.

"Robert!" exclaimed his mother, reprovingly; but the boy was ashamed of his hasty words before she had spoken. However, he helped his aunt into her chair in silence, and then said something in an aside to Lily about Micaiah, the son of Imlah, whom King Ahab hated because he never prophesied good, but always evil.

That dinner was not a very cheerful meal, nor was there any great abundance of delicacies to tempt the mind from gloomy thoughts. At last it was over and as Robert turned despondently away, Mrs. White

followed him to the door to say a few hopeful, consoling words.

"Do not be discouraged, my son," she said. "It will prove to be all for the best. There may be a better opening in the store for you."

"It doesn't look much like it, mother; I feel like giving up the ship," answered Robert, gloomily; and so he went away. He could not bring himself to tell about the counterfeit coin, and explain how dark his prospects really appeared to him. He found it impossible not to blame himself for being so absorbed with his own thoughts as to be so careless; and he doubted not that upon this occurrence had hinged his failure. He felt that Mr. English had understood that his employer was charging him with dishonesty, and that this was the reason why he did not engage him.

But Robert was mistaken in his inference. The matter was decided against him before Mr. English had left his daughter's house that morning; the incident of the counterfeit money only confirming a decision that was already made.

CHAPTER V.

SILVER SPEECH AND GOLDEN SILENCE.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."—Matt. xii, 34.

"Seest thou a man *that is* hasty in his words? *there is* more hope of a fool than of him."—Prov. xxix, 20.

THE ability to converse with one another is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the higher order of intelligences. The power of speech has not been conferred upon the brute creation. It belongs to men and angels.

We are told in the Bible that God sent those heavenly messengers to communicate with his earthly children, and even talked with them himself. Does it not, then, seem the desecration of a holy thing, when the power of language is debased to unworthy uses, when words are spoken that are unkind, untrue, impure, or profane?

And then, again, how often we speak unwisely, even when we mean to do no harm. While we should cultivate the art of conversation as one of the good gifts of our heavenly Father, and try to use it for noble purposes, we should not forget to keep the door of our lips, and should bear in mind that the wise man has said: "A fool's voice is known by multitude of words."

Lily White went to school, on the day following the events of our last chapter, with a feeling of mortification mingled with her disappointment. She had unwisely informed her schoolmates of Robert's expected promotion, their intention of removing to Everton, and some other plans which it were better not to have divulged, at least until they were matured.

She had not spoken in a boastful spirit, but from a wish to confide in her friends and receive their good wishes in view of her bright prospects. Now those prospects had vanished like a mist of the morning, and what should she say? She wished most heartily that she had been more discreet. Besides, she remembered now that there were some in the school who were like that one of whom the proverb says, "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword," and she dreaded to encounter the thrusting of their tongues.

She walked very slowly that she might not reach the school-room until the ringing of the second bell; but she had not far to go, and so failed to accomplish her object. She lingered for a little while in the cloak-room, and just as she was about to go to the school-room she heard voices in the passage. They came nearer, and she stepped behind the door to avoid an encounter with Lydia Jennings, who was one of the most formidable talkers whom she knew.

The girls halted not far from Lily's hiding-place,

and she heard Lydia say, in a laughing tone: "I wonder how soon the Whites will move to Everton?"

"Are they going to move?" asked Augusta Clark.

"Why, didn't you hear Lil's big stories?" questioned the first speaker. "O yes, they were going to Everton, and Bob was to have a big situation, and Lil was to take music lessons, and wear bells on her fingers and bells on her toes, and O, I can't tell you the half!"

"Then keep to the facts and don't embellish so highly," said another voice.

"Well, it turns out," Lydia went on, "that they didn't wait till their chickens hatched before bragging on them. Bob didn't get the new place, and is, indeed, in a fair way to lose the old one. It was old Mr. French, or English, or whatever his name is, Mrs. Norton's father, who was thinking of employing Bob; but the old gentleman found out something and backed out."

"I doubt whether he will be able to find a better clerk than Bob White," answered Augusta, who, remembering the society, was earnestly trying to cultivate the grace of speaking well of others, and of defending the absent, as far as possible; these being among the by-laws of the society.

Lydia laughed in a disagreeable way.

"You precious little ignoramus!" she exclaimed. "Why, Miss M'Pheters tells that he has been caught

in the act of stealing money from Mr. Harvey's cash-drawer."

"Miss M'Pheters!" echoed one of her listeners, incredulously.

"Yes, Miss M'Pheters," replied Lydia; "and you know that she would never hint such a thing if it were not absolutely certain. I had it from Octavia Norton herself, so, you see, it comes straight. Mrs. Norton told the old gentleman and put him on his guard. I reckon Mr. Harvey wishes that he had employed a clerk who was honest, and I suppose Lil White will not go to Germany immediately."

"Did she say she was going to Germany?" asked one of the girls.

"O, no," admitted Lydia; "but she could not learn much more about music in this country, and I suppose that was the next thing on the programme. I mean to ask her the next time I see her."

"O, Lydia, you couldn't be so cruel!" answered Augusta, as the girls passed into the school-room.

A moment later Lily White crept from behind the door and made her way down the stairs, crying bitterly, and holding by the banisters as if she feared that she should fall.

She met Kate Harvey on the landing, who, seeing her pale face, asked her if she was sick. She answered in the affirmative, but shrank from her schoolmate's proffered help, and went on her way alone.

Lily White had always been a delicate girl, and no particular importance was attached to the incident when Kate came in and told Miss Maxwell. But Augusta Clark glanced, in a startled way, at Lydia Jennings, and whispered:

"I wonder if she could have heard."

Lydia only made a grimace in return, and taking Kate aside, began an earnest conversation. Truth compels me to say that she was repeating the same pitifully unfeeling remarks to another listener, which had fallen so cruelly on poor Lily's ears a short time before.

But now the bell rang and the hum of voices ceased, and silence fell, like a blessing, on the little assembly, and then the duties of the day began.

Kate Harvey found it impossible to settle herself comfortably to study. She was wondering uneasily whether the story she had just heard was a confirmation of what she had guessed to be the subject of conversation between her mother and Miss M'Pheters, or whether it was only an exaggerated edition of her own conjecture.

She began to wish that she had said nothing about a matter of which she knew so little, and had been obliged to infer so much in order to make a striking bit of news, such as she loved to be the first to tell.

Could it be possible that her thoughtless words had been the cause of Lily's trouble and her brother's disappointment and loss of good name? The thought

was painful to her. She would have shrunk from the deliberate utterance of a falsehood, much more one that could injure the character of another; but had she unwittingly done this in her eagerness "to tell of some new thing?"

Then she reflected, and I am afraid that she almost grasped at the hope that the story of Robert White's dishonesty was true, and that the exposure had come through some other channel than her own thoughtless words.

At recess she questioned Lydia Jennings as to how she had heard of the matter.

"Why, they say Miss M'Pheters told it," answered Lydia, glibly. "I heard it from Octavia Norton, and she said something about his getting into further trouble by passing counterfeit money. Ask your uncle all about it, Kate, and let us have the whole story," she added, with the relish of those who are ready to roll a bit of scandal, like a sweet morsel, under their tongues.

Kate answered "Well" to the proposition, but she instinctively shrank from the thought of mentioning the subject at home. The belief would force itself upon her that she was accountable for the trouble in the White family.

True, she had said nothing about counterfeiting. Somebody else must have started that story, and she felt relieved at the thought. But the recollection of Lily's pale, sad face would come between her and the

page on which she tried to fix her attention, and it seemed to her that if her guilty fears should prove correct, that face would haunt her forever.

At dinner she tried to force herself to ask her uncle about the charge of passing counterfeit money, but whenever she attempted to frame the question, the words seemed to stick in her throat.

It was noticed by her friends that she was silent, a very unusual occurrence, and Della asked her if the new society prohibited talking entirely.

She managed to parry the question in some way, and then her uncle said that perhaps she was making an effort to bring up past arrears.

Kate blushed guiltily at this suggestion, and said nothing. She talked little and ate less, and wished, O how fervently! that she had sooner learned the value of silence. She tried to hope that Lily was only feeling a little unwell, and that she would return to school in the afternoon; but she did not come. Day after day passed, and still her place remained vacant.

At last the climax was added to Kate Harvey's fear and remorse by hearing from that incorrigible newsmonger, Lydia Jennings, that her Uncle Rupert had discharged Bob White. She could stand the suspense no longer. She would ask her uncle about the matter, even at the risk of seeming to meddle in what did not concern her. She would embrace the first opportunity to learn the truth.

The first opportunity was at breakfast, the most inauspicious occasion that could offer. She knew that her uncle would be much more genial and communicative at dinner, but she said to herself that she could not wait; she must know the truth, and, if possible, get rid of the painful spirit of unrest and suspicion which possessed her.

"Uncle Rupert, have you turned Bob White away?"

She put the question abruptly, for she had not the patience to use any preliminaries. Her uncle did not answer for a moment, but stirred his coffee as though he had not heard.

"No, I have not turned him away," he said, presently, and Kate's spirits rose for a moment, only to sink again as he added: "He has turned himself away without giving any reason for his freak. What do you think of that in your 'model boy?'" he continued, addressing Mrs. Harvey.

"Perhaps he is disappointed that Mr. English did not engage him," that lady suggested.

"That is no reason for quarreling with his bread and butter," answered Mr. Harvey, impatiently.

"Did he steal or pass counterfeit money?" put in Kate, determined to get to the bottom of the matter, now that she had made the venture.

Again there was a moment's trying silence.

"Nonsense!" replied her uncle, shortly; "the boy is as honest as I am. He mistook a spurious

coin the other day for a good one, as experts have sometimes been known to do; but that has nothing to do with the matter. I agreed to let him off to go with Mr. English, since he could do better by him than my business justifies me in doing. But Mr. English concluded to get a clerk in Everton. If he is moping over his disappointment, I imagine that hunger will bring him to a better mind; but I have engaged Ned Jennings, who wanted the place when White got it before. Any thing else you would like to know, Kate?"

Poor Kate! her face flushed painfully. There was more that she would have liked to know, but which she feared that neither her Uncle Rupert nor any one else could assure her of. She would have liked to know that Robert White had not resigned his position in the store on account of the miserable stories that were in circulation. She would have liked to know that the blame of first setting on foot the wretched, growing slander did not lie at her door? She faltered, "No sir," in answer to her uncle's question, and presently asked to be excused.

She went to her room and sat down to think the matter over. How she longed to confide her troubles to her mother, and ask for comfort and counsel! How she wished that she had long ago tried to curb her propensity for talking too much, of which her mother had often warned her!

She almost wished that she had been born one of

the unfortunates whom she had once visited with her uncle at an asylum for deaf-mutes.

How much trouble we might spare ourselves and others if we would only consider the consequences of wrong-doing before committing the wrong, instead of waiting to be brought face to face with it when it seems to be hopelessly irremediable. If this girl of my story, who was made to suffer so keenly for her fault, had been possessed of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price; if she had been humbly striving to copy the character of the great Example whose lips dropped loving words of invitation and instruction, she would have found it easier to correct her fault.

CHAPTER VI.

FOOLISH COUNSELORS.

"Every purpose is established by counsel."—Prov. xx, 18.

"He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things: moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass."—Prov. xvi, 30.

HALF a dozen boys were congregated in a corner of the school-grounds, all talking at once.

"Go in, Jack, and whip them all;" "I can beat that;" "Just wait till you hear from me," and like expressions arose on the babel of sounds.

"Silence!" commanded another voice, and one of the larger boys, hoisted on the shoulders of two others, spoke as follows:

"See here, fellows, the three who can play the most and the best tricks between now and Thursday noon are to be pitcher, striker, and catcher, after drawing straws for the places. Now, honor bright, boys! No fibbing nor coloring."

"Honor bright! honor bright!" responded the chorus, and the boys dispersed. Some of these were members of the society for the reform of the tongue, but it did not seem to occur to them that this consultation for devising mischief was one phase of the evil which they had pledged themselves to try to correct. It is true that the evil first arose in the

thought, but it would far better have remained unspoken.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof."

Many other, better plans might have been adopted for deciding the question, as some of the boys afterward acknowledged to themselves.

An account of all the pranks that were played in Plainville in the next three days, as a result of this foolish compact, would consume too much space, so I shall notice but a few, some of which, as practical jokes too often do, entailed serious consequences.

Jack Robinson was a good-natured boy of about ten years of age, full of fun, and fairly in his element when there was any thing like a joke on hand.

"I'll begin with Norah," he said to himself, as he turned toward his home. He walked along slowly, seemingly in a deep study, a part of the way, and then he quickened his steps and hurried along, as if in great haste to do something to secure one of the three places of honor in the new ball club.

On reaching home Jack went to the umbrella-stand, and then he turned around and took down his father's overcoat and a hat from the rack. Just at this moment a gentleman came out of the office, which was just across the hall, and a little later the doctor himself made his appearance.

He was evidently thinking of his patients, and he looked grave and pre-occupied as he came up to where

Jack was standing, and, taking the overcoat from his hand, said:

"Thank you, my boy, I will put it on. We are going to have a chilly, wet evening," and, donning the overcoat and hat, he went out.

Jack smiled a little to himself as his father disappeared, and then began to whistle. Whatever the trick he contemplated, no opportunity for its execution seemed to offer during the evening, and, after moving about restlessly for some time, he went up stairs and spent the evening writing to his mother, who was at the sea-side on account of her health.

It rained heavily during the night, and the next morning was dull and damp; and Norah was "crosser than two sticks," Jack said. He had disappeared directly after breakfast, and she had not seen him since. She had an errand for him, and had been wishing to see him for an hour; but Jack failed to make his appearance, as he often did when she "preferred his room to his company," as she expressed it; and so she grumbled to herself after a fashion of her own.

"It was myself used to say that I could cook a potato before you could say Jack Robinson. That was before I knew the bothering scamp who bears the name. As for the speaking of that same, it is easy enough yet, but to get the boy to come when he is called is quite another matter."

Norah Mulligan was given to soliloquizing, and when she was vexed about something Jack used to

say that she was quarreling with herself. On these occasions, however, it was frequently he with whom she was quarreling in a round-about way.

"Always around with his pranks when his room is wanted," she went on. "Most boys are content with All-fools'-day, but as for Jack, they are all fools' days with him, and never at hand when he can be of any possible use. Jack Robinson!" she concluded, giving the name a prolonged intonation that was quite at variance with the proverbial quickness of its utterance. She descended to the depths of the kitchen cellar, muttering as she went, and just as she re-appeared, the boy came in, looking innocent enough in spite of the hard things which had just been said of him.

"Norah," he began, before she had time to speak, "there's a little fellow at the door who wants to see you. Real nice looking chap. He says his name is Michael Flanigan."

"And sure," broke in Norah, "it can't be the Michael Flanigan that I used to know, and who lives in the old country, for his name was Flaherty, and, besides, he's been dead this many a year."

"Well, you will think the fellow is alive enough when you see him," answered Jack. "But hurry up, Norah, and don't keep him standing at the door; it isn't polite," he added, as he darted out of the room and up stairs like a cat. The unusual occurrence of a visitor to Norah had quite driven out of her mind

the errand for which she had wanted Jack. She stepped before the kitchen mirror and straightened her collar and wiped a little soot from the end of her nose. Having completed these little preparations, she made her way toward the front door.

Michael Flanigan, as Jack had called him, seemed to be waiting patiently. "It must be Mickey O'Leary," said Norah to herself, as soon as she saw him; "he always wore a coat down to his heels, and the highest hat he could find, as if he were trying to make a tall man of himself."

Norah was very near-sighted; and the space between herself and the door seeming a considerable distance, she made the above remark in a very audible tone.

But Mickey, if it was he, did not seem to have heard or to have taken any offense, for as she approached him he seemed to be holding out his hand.

"And sure, Mickey, it is myself as was not expecting the pleasure of seeing you," she began.

A moment later she had discovered that the supposed Mickey consisted of a couple of umbrellas, a walking-stick, an overcoat, a hat, and a pair of driving gloves.

Her remarks on making this discovery would be difficult to record, so thickly interspersed were they with groans and exclamations of a peculiar kind, as she proceeded to demolish "Mickey," and put the overcoat and other articles in their proper places.

Meanwhile Jack, the sole witness of the scene, retreated up stairs from the landing where he had been watching and listening, and lying down on the floor and holding his sides, he rolled about as if in a spasm of pain.

Then he sprang up quickly and went down stairs slowly and noiselessly, peeping over the banister occasionally in a cautious way.

Finding the coast clear, he slipped out of the front door, which Norah had closed, and ringing the bell, he awaited her answer to the summons, laughing to himself. When she made her appearance he asked:

"And sure, has a fellow named Lickey O'Meary been here to-day from the old country?"

"And it is myself will be after informing the doctor of your carryings on, and see if it is not a stop can be put to the same entirely," answered Norah, turning back in a towering rage and rapping at the doctor's door to make known her grievance.

The result of this appeal to the higher powers was the promise of a flogging for master Jack should the annoyance be continued; and Norah went back to her dominion feeling somewhat conciliated. It was not often that the doctor threatened Jack with a flogging, and, to tell the truth, it was not often that Norah desired it, for she was fond of the boy, in spite of the trials to which he subjected her patience. But to-day the provocation had been unusually severe and she was not to be easily pacified.

"Sure and I'll make some lemon pies, since they are the doctor's favorites, for that same promise," she said to herself, as she remembered it complacently.

Norah did not stop to reflect that they were Jack's favorites also; but such was the case, and if he had been consulted he would have chosen the risk of flogging together with lemon pie, rather than an absence of both.

Norah's anger passed away as she proceeded with her pastry making, and she was humming a merry tune when ting-a-ling came another summons to the front door.

"And sure the pies will be after spoiling if I leave them, and it is myself is certain it is that Jack again," muttered Norah.

She went and peeped through a key-hole, which gave her a view of the front door. The next moment she sped to the closet and shortly after emerged with a broom. Opening the door hastily, she rushed into the hall and sprang at the boy who was about to ring again,saying:

"And sure it's the doctor himself as said he would flog you if he caught you at that trick again; but the doctor has just stepped out for a moment, and besides it is myself as will paddle my own canoe as long as I can handle a broom."

Had the boy really been Jack, he would have sprung from the steps with a shout of laughter at

Norah's anger and mixing of metaphors, and with a total absence of fear of the promised flogging.

But it was not Jack. The boy did indeed spring down the steps, but with a frightened look in his eyes, as he hurried around the corner with all speed.

In turning the corner, he ran plump against Jenny King, who was carrying a basket of eggs, and the ruin that resulted cannot be adequately described.

"Georgie Nelson, I wouldn't run over people if I were you!" exclaimed Jennie, impatiently, as, with crimson cheeks, she surveyed the wreck. It was not alone the wreck of a dozen of eggs, but of a prospective cake and her attendance at the picnic to be held next week.

Georgie stammered a brief apology which had something in it about "the baby" and "trying to find another doctor," and started across the street unmindful of a team of horses that was coming at full speed.

Norah, entirely ignorant of her mistake, returned to her kitchen, feeling somewhat like a general who has gained an important victory through some skillful, stragetical movement of his own. She little knew what important results hinged upon her masterly charge with the broom.

CHAPTER VII.

"THAT BOTHERSOME BABY."

"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."—Matt. xii, 36.

GEORGIE NELSON was a careless, ease-loving boy, but in spite of his tendency to selfishness, he had an affectionate disposition, and he dearly loved the helpless little babe which had lately come to his home. The contemptuous remarks which he had made about his tiny sister would have made him very angry if they had come from some other boy. And now that the baby was seriously ill he would have relinquished all the fun of which boy life is supposed to have so much, could he thus have restored the little one to health and strength.

Mr. Nelson was absent from home, and much devolved upon Georgie; but for once he did not grumble over what he was asked to do. He stepped softly about the house, and went to the drug store or wherever he was sent, and then, after promptly and willingly discharging his errands, returned and hurried back to the sick room to watch with his mother beside the crib within which the little face was growing almost as white as the pillows.

The rain pelted against the window panes with a mournful sound, and the clock seemed to tick out the seconds with a solemn meaning.

"Do you think she is any better?" asked Georgie, wistfully.

"I'm afraid not," answered his mother. "You would better go for the doctor again. He said that he did not think it would be necessary for him to call again, but that I must let him know if we needed him."

Now Georgie was very anxious to call the doctor, and yet, contradictory as it may seem, he dreaded to see him. The truth was he had slyly attached an old paper collar by a pin-hook to the doctor's coat-skirt, in the confusion of the crowd at the post-office, on the evening before; and when the doctor discovered the trick, as he went swinging the appendage down the street, Georgie thought that he had looked back at him in a threatening manner.

But there was no time to be lost, and he hurried away, resolved to face a cannon's mouth, if need be, in order to get relief for the baby.

The result of this call at Dr. Robinson's house my reader already knows. The time passed on and on, and there were only the mother and the baby, or the other occupant of the room was unseen and unheard as he drew nigh, for it seemed as if he could not be far away, the death angel who garners alike the ripe grain and the budding flowers.

It seemed to the anxious watcher that help must come soon, very soon to be of any avail. She rose every now and then and went to the window to look down the street, straining her eyes for a glimpse of the physician who seemed so slow to come.

The clock ticked on and on, seeming to measure off the few remaining hours at most of the baby's brief life, and still neither Georgie nor the doctor came.

Several squares away, Georgie was lying on a lounge in a strange room to which he had been carried, while skillful hands were examining a cut on his forehead.

"Do not be frightened, my boy, the wound is not serious, I believe," a gentleman was saying, "and you shall be taken home directly if you will tell us your name and where you live."

But the boy's mind seemed to be wandering. There was a wild look in his eyes as he said:

"O doctor, hurry, hurry please! I am so afraid the baby will die."

The hours passed, and busy life went on. The day drew near its close, and there were homes where the circles were complete, and peace and happiness reigned. And there were homes in which fear and doubt seemed struggling for the mastery of hope and faith. What would the morning bring?

The rain had ceased, and the sun was setting among the clouds of golden splendor. His farewell

rays were creeping up to the tops of the spires, and people who had homes were hurrying homeward.

Dr. Robinson, whose regular visits for the day were ended, rubbed his hands with satisfaction at the thought that his baby patient must be decidedly better, since he had not been called, according to agreement. Still, after all, he could not quite get the baby out of his mind. She was so much like a little one who had once been borne in a tiny, flower-wreathed casket from his own door. But there was Jack; the boy must be looked after, and receive at least a mental castigation, or Norah would be quite driven out of the house.

So the doctor sat down to wait for Jack. He came in presently, whistling "The Sweet By-and-by." He had, for the time, forgotten the joke which he had perpetrated on Norah a few hours before. Indeed, he had since played a number of others that were, to use his own expression, "just jolly."

He had "fooled" several persons with a silver dollar tied to a string. He had dropped an old pocket-book stuffed full of brown paper, and had seen somebody pick it up and examine the contents eagerly, and then fling it spitefully into the gutter. He had tied up a brick-bat in as nice a square package as the handiest salesman in the town could have done, and, placing it on the pavement, he had seen a hungry looking little girl snatch it up and dart into

an alley, as if in fear that some one might claim and take it from her.

"Come here, Jack," said his father, kindly, but firmly.

Jack came willingly, for he loved his father dearly, but he looked a little uneasy as the doctor, with a grave face, put an arm around him, and said nothing for several minutes.

At last the boy asked, softly:

"What is it, please, papa? Is mamma worse?"

"No; mamma is much better, and will be home next week," was the answer. "It is you my boy; I am quite troubled about your case. I hardly know what to prescribe for you."

"I? O, papa," answered Jack; "I am very well, indeed, I assure you. I haven't a pain nor an ache anywhere, and I don't want to take any old rhubarb or other bitter stuff to spoil my supper, for I am as hungry as a wolf."

"Ah, Jack," answered his father, "the sickest people sometimes imagine that they are in perfect health."

"But, papa," said Jack, beginning to look serious, "I haven't been exposed to the small-pox or any thing, have I? What is the matter with me?"

"You have a disease that is worse than the small-pox," replied the doctor, "and you have it very bad. It is a very prevalent disorder, and seems in a measure to be contagious; and yet no one need succumb to it

unless he chooses, as it is not infectious in the way that small-pox is. It is called 'The selfishness that takes pleasure in another's pain, or the love of teasing."

"O, papa!" answered Jack, laughing, "you almost frightened me. I began to think that something very bad was the matter with me really."

"Something very bad is the matter with you really. I wish I could make you feel and understand how very bad it is," was the answer.

"O now, papa," said Jack, coaxingly, "a fellow wants to have a little fun. I don't hurt any body."

"Do not be too sure of that," answered his father. "Does it not hurt you when you are disappointed and foiled in your efforts and expectations? And do you not know of a rule by which we may measure other people's feelings as well as our own?"

"You mean the golden rule," said Jack, looking ashamed.

"Just so, Jack, and how about that compact into which you entered with others to assist in correcting the abuse of language?"

"I haven't been using abusive language, papa!" answered Jack.

"I said the abuse of language," corrected the doctor; "and I wish to inquire if your constitution permits falsehood? I think you told Norah that there was a little fellow at the door who wanted to see her."

"O, papa, that was only a joke," protested Jack.

"Truth is truth, and an untruth is a falsehood," answered Dr. Robinson, firmly. "That is the only point at which the line can be drawn. And again, how about your mimicry of Norah's language? Is it quite kind or fair? If you should attempt to speak the musical tongue of her native land, I doubt not the result would be far more laughable than her construction of English, funny as it may sound to your ears."

Jack hung his head.

"But practical jokes," continued his father, often end in greater trouble than a transient provocation or disappointment. I will tell you a story which will help you to understand and to remember this. When I was a boy about your age, I used to pass, on my way to school, the house of a German silversmith whom the boys delighted to tease. They used to laugh at and mimic his broken English, which was not only grossly rude, but very unkind. It made him very angry when the boys rapped at his door and then dodged round the corner that was near, to listen to the strange, funny mixture of English and German which he would pour forth on discovering that no one was there.

"One cold night we boys had deceived Mr. Hartmann several times. I say we, for I am sorry to admit that I was among them. I would gladly give much to-day to be free from a share in the responsibility of what followed."

"Would you give Hector and Juno?" asked Jack.

"Willingly, and many more such horses if I had them. At last Mr. Hartmann chased us round the corner and shook his fist at us, accompanying the threatening gesture with some remarks that sounded to us particularly funny. We laughed, and he went back to his fire and took off his snowy boots to warm his feet. Later in the evening there came another knock at his door. Mr. Hartmann was tired of opening to nobody, and he muttered a resolve to stay by the fire, which he accordingly did.

There was silence for awhile, and then he heard something strike against the door.

"A snow-ball from one of those young rascals" he said to himself, and presently went to bed, little dreaming what it really was which had fallen against the door.

"There was a heavy fall of snow that night, and in the morning there was a strange looking drift on the silversmith's door-step. When it was cleared away, there was a little girl, cold and stiff, with a face as white as the chilling covering which had fallen over it. It was she who had knocked the last time; it was she who had fallen against the door; and if we had not tired Mr. Hartmann out with our tricks, he would have opened to the perishing wanderer and warmed and cared for her.

"He had the poor little waif decently buried, and the next time we boys came to his door, he followed

us, and beckoning us near, told us the story with tears in his kindly eyes.

"Mr. Hartmann died years ago, and the old silversmith shop disappeared. Mrs. Nelson lives there now, and I called at the house early this morning to see her sick baby; but the sight of the place, much as it has changed, has never ceased to recall that one incident of my boyhood which of all others I would most gladly forget."

Doctor Robinson was called out just as the story was concluded, and Jack heard the messenger say:

"I am afraid the child is dying. Mrs. Nelson sent Georgie for you some hours ago, and he has not returned yet. Have you seen him?"

The doctor said he had not, and hurried away.

Jack went up to his room slowly and thoughtfully, thinking of his father's story, and taking out a dog's-eared little diary, he wrote, in a large boyish hand, the date, and underneath it the words:

"Resolved to quit playing tricks."

Ah, if he had only yielded to advice and made his resolution a little sooner!

When he came down stairs he went out to see Norah, and at sight of her was strongly tempted to tease her again about Mickey O'Leary, but, remembering his father's sad story and his own resolution, he forbore, and tried to make amends for his trick by one or two little services which Norah had often tried in vain to induce him to perform.

"Faith, and I wonder whether it is the flogging the doctor is going to give you, or the sight of me broom has made you so civil, Master Jack," she said, laughing.

"Papa isn't going to flog me, and I haven't seen any thing of your old broom. What do you mean?" retorted Jack.

"O, come now, Jack," replied Norah, "don't be after denying it at all. You did well to be off in a jiffy. If you hadn't skipped down the steps and round the corner when you did, you might have been laid up now with your bruises and broken bones."

"Honor bright, Norah," said Jack, beginning to look uneasy; "did you drive a boy off the steps with the broom."

"Indeed and I did," answered Norah, still laughing. "Why need you be asking that same question?"

"Upon my word, Norah, it wasn't I," said Jack, now thoroughly alarmed. "It must have been some one after papa!"

Jack knew well enough who that "some one" was; but he could not bring himself to admit even to himself that it was Georgie Nelson.

Even short-sighted Norah saw that the boy was dreadfully disturbed; and the kind-hearted soul, who could never bear to see Jack in trouble, notwithstanding the annoyance he often gave her, set to work forthwith to try to comfort him.

"Never do ye mind, Jack," she said. "I expect

it was a boy after the doctor to pull a tooth for some old woman. She can wait awhile well enough; the toothache never kills."

But Jack was wiser than she, and with the awful fear that his resolution had been made too late, he even turned away from the lemon pie with which Norah further sought to console him; and, going into his father's office, sat down to await his return.

Ah, it was such a tiny coffin, and the little sleeper's face and hands looked as white as the petals of the lilies that were placed in the waxen fingers. It was so sad to think that the little one must be laid away in the damp, cold ground, away from the warmth and light, away from her mother's arms, away from all sounds of life and gladness. Jack thought that he would have given worlds not to have seen the dead baby, but his father had said, sternly:

"Yes, I want you to see what you have done; come with me to the house, the same one where I learned my sad lesson long ago."

Jack looked round mournfully for Georgie; but he was not to be seen. What had become of him?

Then they shut down the lid of the little coffin, and it seemed to Jack that all gladness was shut out of his life. It seemed to him that his heart was too full of pain and remorse to endure. He felt as though he could not bear that the baby should be carried away. He felt a mad impulse to throw his arms around the casket and try to awaken the sleeper.

"Come, Jack," said his father's voice. He could not find strength to move or answer.

"Come, Jack." The words were repeated; and with a great effort he gasped: "O papa, is the baby really dead, and Georgie, too?"

"No, Jack, I am thankful to say that they are both alive," answered Doctor Robinson's voice. And Jack woke with a start to find himself in the big chair in the office where he had fallen asleep while waiting for his father's late return.

The recollection of his father's story and the remembrance of his own little sister's death, mingled with the fear and remorse which he felt, had combined to weave the dream which had seemed to him so real.

I am glad to tell you that the baby and Georgie both recovered, and that Jack also recovered from the disease which Doctor Robinson had pronounced "worse than the small-pox."

Whenever he was threatened with an attack he had only to remember the day when his most successful trick had caused him so much pain.

Two lessons had been learned, and two boys were thenceforth more careful of their speech and conduct. Whatever may have been the success or failure of the other competitors, neither Jack nor Georgie recounted his experience, nor was the latter ever again heard to allude to "That bothersome baby."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCATTERED THISTLE SEEDS.

"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."—Matt. xii, 37.

WEEKS passed by and Lily White did not return to school. Robert was seen loafing at the corners, a habit which he had never before been known to indulge in; and Mrs. Harvey spoke of the fact to her brother-in-law, and said that she hoped he would not fall into bad company and evil ways on account of being out of employment.

Mrs. White did not even go to church in those dark days, and the thought of this was a source of new trouble to the girl, who now felt that she was to blame for it all; but Miss 'Rusha seemed to have suddenly developed a very social spirit. Kate Harvey met her on the street repeatedly. She saw her once climbing up the steps of Mrs. Norton's residence, and on another occasion she saw her little figure at Miss M'Pheters's window as she was passing.

All this was ominous of trouble, though Kate did not acknowledge the fact to herself.

One morning she and Della were together in their room engaged upon some fancy work. Della was singing, as usual, for she was light-hearted and gay,

and Kate had once enjoyed her sister's gayety, but she had lately lost her relish for every thing. She was sitting silent, thinking—thinking of the White family, and asking herself, for perhaps the hundredth time, if she were really to blame for the trouble. She was beginning to indulge a very faint hope that she had blamed herself unnecessarily, as nobody had yet accused her of libel.

Della paused in her song long enough to say:

"You would better take off your crimpers, Kate; you look like a fright, or the six-horned, graceful lady," she added, laughing.

Della went on with her work and her singing, and Kate silently went to the mirror to arrange her hair. Her position gave her a view of the front gate, and she suddenly exclaimed, with a start:

"O Dell, there comes Mrs. Norton and Mrs. Clark; and O," she gasped, "Miss 'Rusha and Miss M'Pheters!"

"Well, what of it?" inquired, Della, wonderingly; "you will not be obliged to entertain them. They have come to see about the new Sewing Society, I presume. How cute little Miss 'Rusha looks," she continued, peeping over Kate's shoulder; "she marches like a soldier going to battle."

Kate dropped the brush and turned to leave the room.

"Where are you going? You have taken your hair down only on one side," said Della; but Kate did

not stop to reply. On reaching the hall she noiselessly sped up stairs to the garret as if she were pursued. On reaching the room she looked about eagerly as if in search of something.

"I don't like to get into the chest for fear of the fate of Genevra. O, there is the rag-barrel, that will do," she said, in a frightened undertone; and hastily mounting a small box, she seized the top of the barrel and was about to climb in, when the box turned over, and Kate, box, and barrel fell with a thump to the floor.

Getting upon her feet she righted the barrel, replaced the spilled contents hastily, and made a second attempt. A looker-on would have been astonished and amused, no doubt, at the scene that followed. Cowering down in the queer hiding-place, she piled the rags above and around her until she was entirely concealed. They were musty and dusty, and she felt like suffocating. Then she realized that a sneeze was pending, and in trying to suppress it, it burst forth with a sound that seemed to her loud enough to be heard on the ground-floor.

A little later she heard some one coming up stairs. She listened breathlessly. Yes, it was Becky, and she inquired for "Miss Kate."

"I think she is up in the garret," answered Della.

The servant toiled up the steep stair-way and looked into the attic, but no Kate was to be seen, and she retraced her steps, muttering to herself:

"When I was a girl I could sometimes be found when I was wanted."

Again all was quiet for a time except for the subdued sound of Della's voice, singing, "I'll plant a rose upon thy grave." But presently fat Becky mounted the stairs again, looking crosser than ever.

"Look here, Miss Della," she said, "that child is wanted in the parlor immediately. If you'll find her, I'll do up your ruffled, furbelowed muslins and lawns ever day in the week, if you want me."

"That is a bargain," responded Della, laughing. "I'll find her: I heard her up in the garret awhile ago," and, still singing her song, she went in search of the fugitive.

She peered into the dark corners, and looked into the big chest, and then approached the barrel. All was silent save the song refrain:

> "I'll plant a rose upon thy grave,
> To beautify the lonely scene."

"Please don't, Dell," pleaded a muffled voice.

"Well, I don't believe I will, since you have buried yourself in the rag-barrel," answered the teasing sister, mercilessly.

"Pshaw! Dell, I mean don't tell where I am," pursued Kate, emerging from her covering and looking out with a very rueful face.

"O, I have done that already," replied Della. "Besides, mamma has sent for you twice and wants

you right away. What upon earth induced you to hide yourself?"

And then, as the funny, forlorn figure rose up and climbed out, Della sat down on the chest and laughed until the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"O dear, O dear!" she groaned; "it is too ridiculous!"

But Kate's face would not have worn a more solemn expression if she had just received the summons to her execution. As she made her way down stairs she was met at the door of her room by Becky, who said:

"Here I have been leaving my work to hunt the house over for you, and your mother and ever so many more ladies waiting for you in the parlor! Now see if I lose sight of you again till I see you safe at the door."

True to her word, Becky marshaled her captive to the parlor door, and then gave her a little push as she entered.

Poor Kate! her feelings were not to be envied as she confronted that, to her, formidable array of faces. She had a terrible foreboding of the nature of the business to be transacted, and her appearance was in keeping with the state of her mind. A more sorry looking object could scarcely be conceived. A row of crimpers extended half across her forehead, while the dark frizzed hair that covered the other side was plentifully besprinkled with lint and ravelings from

the rags among which she had been hiding. Shreds and threads clung to her dress in various places, and a long, frayed piece of ruffling was festooned to one of the buttons on the back of her basque. This appendant ornament streamed fantastically behind her as she turned to find a chair after coming forward to greet the visitors.

Mrs. Norton smiled involuntarily, but Miss 'Rusha White was in no mood for smiles.

For a few minutes no one spoke, but Miss 'Rusha kept her little ungloved, wrinkled hands working nervously. Finally she said, looking severely at the trembling culprit:

"A very damaging story about Robert White is afloat in this gossiping community—a rumor of his having stolen money from his employer. I have been hunting it down for some time, and I have unmistakably traced it back to you, Miss. Now, we should all like to hear what you know about the matter."

Poor Kate! the eyes of every one in the room were fixed upon her. She almost wished for annihilation. What did she know about it? What should she say? She hesitated for a moment, and then took refuge in a side issue.

"I never said any thing about his passing counterfeit money," she faltered.

"Stealing, child; stealing, I said! Stick to the subject," retorted Miss 'Rusha, rapping on the floor with her umbrella.

She looked like a little girl dressed as an old lady as she sat on a high chair, which she had managed somehow to reach, and which she had refused to exchange for a lower one, with her feet a long way from the floor; but to Kate the appearance of the tiny old lady was more terrible than that of a giant armed with sword and spear.

"My dear," interposed Miss M'Pheters, "it is said that you have stated that I charged Robert with dishonesty, in a conversation with your mother. I trust that you can prove the report to be untrue."

"I—I never said that you said so," stammered Kate. "I only said you were talking low about something important, and I heard you mention Bob's name, and I heard mamma say something about his poor mother, and that I guessed that was what you were talking about."

How preposterous it all sounded, even to her own ears!

"You guessed so! You guessed so!" repeated Miss 'Rusha, hopping down from her chair and walking over to where the miserable girl sat trembling in every limb. "And so you circulate a rumor and destroy the character of a fatherless boy with others dependent on him, and ruin his prospects and bring misery on his friends, because you happen to hear his name mentioned in a low tone in conversation, and guess that somebody is accusing him of stealing!"

Kate gasped, but she could not have spoken if

she had had any thing to say, and Miss 'Rusha went on:

"Miss M'Pheters was telling your mother of the good character that Robert had built up by honest industry and *minding his own business*, and of the bright prospects before him; and she and your mother were rejoicing over his success, in a kindness of heart of which you, Miss, seem entirely destitute."

"O, Miss 'Rusha!" exclaimed Kate, bursting into tears, "Miss M'Pheters, mamma, every body, forgive me. Indeed, I did not mean to be so bad and do such harm! I will go around and correct the rumor."

Miss 'Rusha interrupted her sharply:

"Child, child, did you ever hear of the woman who sowed a handful of winged thistle-seeds broadcast, and let the wind carry them far and wide, and how she afterward tried to gather them up again?"

"Do not be discouraged, Miss 'Rusha," spoke up Mrs. Clark. "We will all join in the effort to clear up this unhappy affair, and I think that it can be done. Robert's character will only stand out the more spotless when the story has been contradicted, and, indeed, I do not think that it is widely known. Rest assured that every thing that can be done will be done."

Then Miss 'Rusha's righteous indignation gave way to softer feelings, and she went and leaned her elbows on the chair where she had been sitting, and

buried her face in her handkerchief. No one had ever seen her give way to what she called "such weakness" before; and if Robert White could have known all that his aunt felt in that moment, he would have experienced a fresh remorse for having accused her of "always hoping for the worst."

Alas, these unruly tongues!

To say that Mrs. Harvey was deeply pained would but feebly describe her feelings on learning of her daughter's fault, and Kate's consciousness of her mother's pain added to her own.

But if the girl had grievously erred, she strove most earnestly, in the face of shame and humiliation, to repair the evil she had done; and, with the help of her friends, she so far succeeded that it was thought not one shadow of stain remained on the reputation of the injured one.

The task of clearing up the affair was far from pleasant, but its effect was good. Not only was Robert's good name restored, but it was instrumental in working a radical reform in Kate's own character. She never forgot that "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from trouble."

The White family did not leave Plainville, but Robert was employed by Mr. Clark, and was in time enabled to do more for his mother, sister, and aunt than he had even planned to do before.

Nor was the lesson entirely lost upon Octavia Norton, although she still made an intimate associate of

Lydia Jennings. As for Lydia, she still went on in the way which she had chosen; but her spiteful gossip soon came to be regarded as unworthy of attention, since it was generally known that her ill-natured remarks were usually prompted by feelings of personal resentment. And so the foolish girl injured no one but herself. Such is the lot of those who say, "Our lips are our own. Who shall rule over us?"

CHAPTER IX.

FREE SPEECH.

"A tale-bearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter."—Prov. xi, 13.

"A fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards."—Prov. xxix, 11.

MANY of the boys and girls of Plainville were learning to obey the wise precept, "Keep the door of thy lips;" and those who were looking to the state of the heart, that well-spring of speech, and seeking divine aid to enable them to overcome their faults, were making marked progress.

There were some who scornfully refused to co-operate in the work of reform, and still went on in the old way.

Lydia Jennings was one of these. She said that she had no intention of wearing a muzzle, or putting herself into a strait-jacket. I have told my reader that this mistaken girl had lost the respect of most of those who knew her by the unrestrained indulgence of her tongue. She was, however, less blamable than some others, her mother being dead, and her father absent from home the greater part of the time.

Lydia and her brother knew little of conversation

except as a vehicle for gossip and news-telling, and, though it may be harmless and even well to talk of people, and every one can find something good to say of nearly all persons, still those whose talk is all of people and their affairs give their conversation a very narrow channel, and frequently degenerate into evil-speaking. You have seen that it was so in this instance. And when it became rumored that Lydia was soon to leave Plainville, there were few expressions of regret.

It was understood that she was going to live with her father's sisters, two maiden ladies who were very wealthy.

Lydia had indulged in the same weakness for which she had so mercilessly criticised Lily White. There were few of her acquaintances who had not learned of her expectations; few who had not learned of the splendid, great house and beautiful grounds, the gardens and conservatories at "The Maples," which Lydia described in glowing terms, although she had never been there in her life.

She was very much elated at the prospect, and felt so confident that she should go, that she quite lost sight of the fact that the arrangements had not yet been completed for the change which she considered so desirable, and that it might be her cousin Annie, instead of herself, who should be chosen to the happy lot of living at "The Maples."

It was strange that she should not have exercised

more discretion after the example of premature planning and talking which had lately come to her knowledge.

"I wouldn't feel too certain about it if I were you," Ned said to her one evening when she was talking as usual of her brilliant prospects. "May be it will be Annie."

"Annie!" exclaimed Lydia, scornfully. "Do you suppose they will take Annie when they can have me? Aunt Margaret was very much pleased with my music when she was here. I saw that plainly. Annie can neither sing nor play, and I am far ahead of Lily White."

"Who is saying any thing about Lily White?" asked her brother, laughing. "I do believe you envy that girl her magnificent voice."

"Magnificent!" echoed Lydia, in a very disagreeable tone, and with her face marred by evil feelings. "It is as shrill and sharp as a katydid's! I'd as soon hear somebody filing a saw!"

"O come now, Lyd," persisted Ned, "your voice will do pretty well, if it isn't as good as Lily's. I wouldn't get so furious if I were you."

This remark was fuel to the flame of Lydia's anger and envy. She answered, in a loud tone:

"I say it is a great deal better. It is clearer and has more compass and volume."

"More compass and volume!" mimicked Ned. "Well, Professor Vollenstein, I must say you are a

better parrot than Lily, if you are not so good a singing bird." With this parting thrust Ned left the room.

"Mean, hateful, aggravating story-teller!" called out Lydia, as her brother went down the front steps. The words had barely left her lips when Mr. Henry and Judge Morris passed. Lydia knew that they must have heard her spiteful, unsisterly words, and a blush mounted to her very forehead at the thought.

"It is all the fault of that detestable boy," she said to herself. "I am glad he will not be the plague of my life much longer. When I go to "The Maples" I shall be appreciated and treated properly."

But, notwithstanding her self-justification, she was ashamed to look Mr. Henry in the face when she met him a few days afterward. Ah! we should never use language that we should blush to have others hear!

Lydia was beginning to feel that her tongue had gained her some discredit, and yet she made no proper effort to restrain it. She was glad that the time had almost come for her to leave Plainville.

On the morning of her aunt's expected arrival she went to her room to examine her wardrobe. She looked over her dresses and decided as to those she should wish to take away with her, and those which were to be left behind.

"I'll take only my best ones, and give my old school dresses to Martha. Of course I shall have some fine new ones before long," she said to herself.

Martha came into the room not long afterward, and she proceeded to carry out her plan for getting rid of her old clothes. Then she emptied her drawers and proceeded to pack away a part of her wardrobe.

"I wish it was Aunt Margaret instead of Aunt Priscilla who is coming," she said to the girl who stood looking on; "I have never seen Aunt Pris, and Ned says she is as stiff as starch. I suppose I shall go home with her when she returns. I wish I had a new dress to travel in. I expect I shall look very shabby by the side of the fine old lady. See what time it is, Martha, I must be at the depot when the nine o'clock train comes in."

The servant returned to say that it was half past eight. So Lydia sprang up from the carpet where she was sitting, and leaving various garments strewed around, started out to meet her aunt, calling on the way for Octavia Norton. The two girls reached the depot before the train arrived, and took seats in the waiting room. Lydia was, as usual, talking eagerly, and as her language was not violently abusive, she was evidently unconcerned as to who should hear her. However, there was no one in the room except a rather plain looking old lady in a rusty alpaca and a bonnet that was neither poke, fanchon, nor capote.

Lydia lowered her tone slightly to say, with a little grimace,

"What a love of a bonnet! And that dress must be fresh from Worth's."

"Hush, Lydia," whispered her companion, "she might hear you."

"No matter," was the careless rejoinder, "she doesn't know who I am, and she's going to take the next train I suppose; besides, I guess she is deaf any way; she looks as if she might be."

Octavia was glad to notice that the subject of her companion's rude remarks did not seem to have heard them.

Lydia rattled on:

"By the way, speaking of talking, Plainville is getting so prim and puritanical that one hardly dares say one's soul is one's own. I am sick and tired of so much mincing sentimentalism. I believe in free speech."

"Is that what you said you were quarreling with Ned about?" asked Octavia.

"No, indeed," was answered. "Ned was saying just the hatefulest things he could think of in the hatefulest kind of a way. He even went so far as to insinuate that Aunt Margaret and Aunt Pris might choose Annie instead of me. The bare idea! She's a little goose, perfectly prim and proper, always knitting missionary socks and working for the heathen when she has a minute to spare; bah! We are not much alike, are we?" she concluded, laughing merrily and unrestrainedly, although others were now entering the room. This freedom of demeanor has cast reproach on the name of American girls.

"Well, you certainly do not work much for the heathen or anybody else," answered Octavia.

"No; I was set apart for a higher lot in life," replied Lydia.

"I suppose you will devote yourself to your aunts," suggested her companion.

"Just wait till you hear from me!" laughed Lydia; "wont I help those two old maids to spend their fabulous wealth?"

But I will not tax my reader's feelings with any more of the conversation of this selfish, frivolous girl at present. Suffice it to say that the stream flowed on uninterruptedly until the second train came in.

There were only two passengers for Plainville. One was a troubled-looking young woman with a child in her arms and another clinging to her dress. The other was a handsomely dressed, middle-aged lady, wearing gold spectacles.

Miss Priscilla Jennings without doubt, thought Lydia, as she went forward and said:

"You are my dear Aunt Priscilla, are you not? I am delighted to see you."

"Not at all, you have made a mistake," was the astounding answer, and the richly attired lady in gold spectacles passed out.

Octavia Norton laughed in spite of herself, and even the grim-looking old lady in the shabby bonnet smiled dryly. Lydia was much disappointed.

"Why can't people speak the truth?" she said,

impatiently. "See if I come down here and wait half an hour again for nothing!"

"May be she will come to-morrow," suggested Octavia.

"Well, let her come, and let her find her way as well as she can," retorted Lydia, as the two went out just behind the old lady in the black alpaca, who turned down in the direction of the Plainville House.

"I wonder who that antiquated old woman is?" continued Lydia, in an unguarded way. "She has certainly come to the right place so long as it bears the name of Plainville."

With this poor little attempt at witticism, Lydia bade her companion good-bye, and went home.

"I guess you will not go to 'The Maples?'" said Ned, teasingly, when he came in to supper that evening.

"I guess I shall," retorted Lydia. "Papa said I might go whenever Aunt Margaret or Aunt Priscilla came for me."

"I don't think they will come," answered the brother, mysteriously.

"That is all you know about it," replied Lydia; "and when I am gone I expect you will wish that you had not been so aggravating and mean."

"I don't think I shall pine away and die," replied Ned. "By the way, Lyd, have you packed your trunks yet?"

"Partly," replied his sister, defiantly.

Ned threw himself back in his chair, and laughed loud and long, but his mirth called forth no questions or further remarks from Lydia. She had talked of going away until the idea had become firmly fixed in her mind. She returned to her room, and went on with the work of preparation for her expected journey, saying to herself:

"She will be sure to come to-morrow."

CHAPTER X.

THE DECISION.

"They speak vanity every one with his neighbor: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak."—Psa. xii, 2.

"Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee."—Prov. iv, 34.

LYDIA JENNINGS rose early on the following morning and looked at her half-filled trunk with a little sinking of heart, as she remembered Ned's words of the day before. Could it be that he had received a letter explaining why her aunt did not come? Could it be that Annie had been chosen after all? But, then, Aunt Priscilla had promised to see both of the cousins before deciding, and surely she would not break her word. She might have been detained in some way; and, clinging to this hope, Lydia made her toilet and went down stairs.

She did not spend a moment returning thanks for blessings or asking for the strength of which she stood so sorely in need.

Ned, having finished his breakfast, was just leaving the room as she entered.

"Did you get a letter from Aunt Priscilla?" she forced herself to ask.

"Not I," answered her brother.

"Nor Aunt Margaret?"

"Nor Aunt Margaret."

"Nor any body?"

"Nor any body," he answered, laughing.

"Then why do you think she will not come for me?" pursued Lydia.

"Just wait and you will find out, since you don't believe that I am a true prophet," was the reply.

"You would be glad to have it so!" exclaimed Lydia, angrily.

"Of course I do not want to lose my amiable sister," Ned retorted, sarcastically; and so the war of words went on. Alas, that those bound by the tenderest of human ties should so often strive for the pitiful victory of the last and most tantalizing speech!

Ned passed out, and then turned back to ask:

"Are you going to the depot this morning, Lydia?"

"Yes, I am!" answered the sister, defiantly; and Ned replied:

"All right; give my love to Aunt Pris if you see her, and don't leave home without saying farewell to your disconsolate brother."

After Ned had gone, Lydia almost concluded not to go to the depot after all. Ned really seemed to know something which she did not. Perhaps he had received a telegram; she had not thought of that. She went up stairs again when she had finished her

breakfast, and picked up some of the garments that were piled upon chairs. Then she looked into the closets and noted the empty hooks from which she had taken the dresses which had been given to Martha. Had she been too hasty? She thought of her biting, unfeeling words in reference to Lily White, and of the mortification that awaited her if her plans should fail, as Lily's had done.

No, she would not harbor the thought; she would not give up yet. Taking out her hat and gloves, she prepared to go again to the depot.

She did not call for Octavia this time. She felt, somehow, as if she would rather be alone, particularly if a new disappointment awaited her.

Again the nine o'clock train came, and again she retraced her steps unaccompanied by Aunt Priscilla. What if Ned had written to her telling her not to come? If he had, she said to herself, she would never forgive him. She questioned him again at dinner, but got only short answers. He was flushed and had sore throat and no appetite. Remembering an attack of fever which he once had, Lydia began to think that perhaps it was not very sisterly and kind to wish to go away from home. If Ned should be very sick again she would be needed. She had elicited the praise of the physician for her careful nursing on the former occasion, and her brother had seemed very grateful to her on his recovery. She almost felt glad she was at home.

There was really love between this brother and sister, but, alas! how rarely they let it be seen.

Lydia's apprehensions were destined to be realized. When Ned came home again in the evening he was obliged to go at once to bed. His pulse was high, and his head and limbs were aching violently. Morning found him delirious. The doctor was called and a letter was sent to his father.

Then followed days and nights of pain and watching. Lydia again took her place as nurse, for good old Janet, however willing, would go to sleep in spite of all her efforts to keep awake; and even Mr. Jennings, when he arrived, could only relieve his daughter for a little while. It was Lydia who received the physician's orders and reported the patient's symptoms. It was she who administered the medicines and bathed his hot forehead from time to time.

She forgot her late disappointment, or remembered it only to feel glad that it had come. One morning, when she was arranging the press in Ned's room, his coat fell from the hook where it had been hastily hung on that evening which now seemed so long ago; and in stooping to replace it, she found a letter which had fallen from the pocket. It was addressed to her, and bore the post-mark which told her that it was from her aunts. She conjectured the truth, that Ned in his pain had forgotten to give it to her, and, putting it in her pocket, she waited until she should have leisure to read it.

Ned had known something, then. She looked at him, but felt no anger toward him now as he tossed and moaned in the delirium of fever. She did not care much for the contents of the letter; she only cared that her brother should get well, and mentally resolved that if his life should be spared, she would be a better sister than she had been.

Late that night, when Ned was enjoying the first quiet sleep which he had known for weeks, and Lydia was sent to her room to rest herself, she opened her letter. It ran thus:

"MY DEAR LYDIA: I have come to the conclusion that Annie will suit us best. I have learned that she is industrious, unselfish, and quiet, three very praiseworthy traits of character even in 'a little goose!' There may be found 'old maids' who stand in need of some one to 'help them spend their fabulous wealth;' but your Aunt Margaret and I are not of the number. Besides which, I may add, that loud girls who talk in public places for the ear of all who may chance to listen, are not quite to my taste, to say nothing of the flattering lips and double heart which gave the affectionate greeting to one who was *not*

"Your affectionate 'AUNT PRIS,' or the old lady in the 'Worth dress' and the 'love of a bonnet.'"

"P.S.—I took the early train in order to give myself a little more time."

Poor Lydia! her face burned hot with blushes of shame as she read the above quotations from her foolish, unkind remarks. She could not have believed that they would sound so disgusting until she read them, transcribed by another hand than her own.

This letter was followed by another:

"MY DEAR LYDIA: Your Aunt Priscilla, according to her promise to Ned, has written to you immediately on her return from Plainville; but before mailing I feel like adding a few lines to express my regret for your disappointment, if such it should prove to be. I should have been glad to see you; but perhaps it is best that we should take Annie, as she has not the opportunity of making a happy home for others as you have. As to the meeting to which your Aunt Priscilla alludes, you cannot feel more unhappy about the affair than I. My dear child, I would gladly have spared you the pain and mortification which you now experience; but I feel confident that when, by the grace of God, you have subdued your faults—from which none are free—and have developed into 'a perfect woman nobly planned,' you will be thankful for the remedy which, I doubt not, will effect a cure. You are yet young, and have good qualities; bring them forth to full maturity, and do not let your character be marred by any blemishes. With much love I remain

"Yours affectionately, AUNT MARGARET."

If Lydia had flushed with shame and anger on reading the first letter, the second melted the last vestige of hardness which she was trying to cherish in her heart.

Sitting down by the bed she buried her face in the pillows and wept long and bitterly. Her eyes were opened to see herself as she was seen by others. Good resolutions were awakened. She would try to justify her Aunt Margaret's loving hopes. She would go to the Source of strength to which she had been directed.

The days passed on, and Ned recovered slowly, and with the return of strength came the exacting, capricious moods with which invalids often try the patience of their nurses and friends. But Lydia seemed to have acquired new strength. She was equal to every emergency. She answered all her brother's querulousness with gentleness, or else was silent. One day her father said to her:

"It is a fortunate thing that your aunts did not take you away at once, Lydia. How soon do you think you must go to 'The Maples?'" he asked, a little sadly.

"I am not going at all, papa; they don't want me," answered Lydia, blushing as she spoke, at the recollection of her fault and its exposure still fresh in her memory.

"They don't want you?" repeated her father. "Well, Lydia, we want you—Ned and I; and we

shall both be very glad of the decision, if you are not too much disappointed. I am going into business at home soon, and I should have missed my daughter sadly if she had gone away."

"I shall not go away; I don't want to go. I want to stay with you and Ned," answered Lydia, and then she went out of the room to hide her feelings.

It would require too much space to recount the struggles of this girl, so full of faults, in overcoming the weaknesses which beset her; but I am able to record that she at last emerged from the conflict a noble specimen of womanhood, erect and free; not, indeed, in her own strength, but by constant watchfulness and dependence upon Him who is able to provide a way of escape from every temptation.

My reader, have you contracted the habit of "much speaking?" And do you "let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt"—the salt of wisdom and love? Or have you fallen into the too-prevalent habit of those who speak vanity, who indulge in "loud and stubborn" language, and "who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words?"

Have you tried to tame your tongue and failed in your efforts? Then know that the stronger the force of habit has become, the more need there is for constant, untiring effort to break away from its control. Let your resolve be that of the psalmist, "I will take

heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue." Psa. xxxix, 1.

A few foolish, hasty, or angry words may not seem of great importance; but if we would bear in mind that every word which we utter reaches the sacred ear of God, would we not choose our speech more carefully? And let us not forget that this evil is one which grows at a fearful rate with its indulgence. Careless, half-perceptible exaggeration of the truth is only a specious form of falsehood. Heedless, slightly irreverent words are but the stepping-stones to profanity, and we may not lose sight of the fact, that among the sins of the tongue is that sin of sins at thought of which the soul shrinks back with trembling horror, the sin which has no forgiveness, the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost!

Seek earnestly the help that cometh from above. Study the character of Jesus, who "spake as never man spake." Study "the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth," and strive to conform your life to his teaching, lifting up continually the prayer, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer." Psa. xix, 14.

"Jesus, Saviour, let me be
Daily more and more like thee.
Make me gentle, patient, meek,
So that all the words I speak,

Whether many, whether few,
May be tender, kind, and true;
Words of praise, and words of prayer,
Words to lighten heavy care,
Words outspoken for the right,
Words that lead the way to light,
Words of warning bravely rung,
Words of soothing sweetly sung,
Words of love, and words of cheer,
Such as thou art pleased to hear."

PART II.

LIFE AT THE OLD RECTORY.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAMILY COUNCIL.

"It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man."—Psa. cxviii, 8.

ALTHOUGH the reformation in Plainville was very marked, there was still much of the talking evil remaining, and it produced effects which, like the dropping of a pebble into the ocean, made ever-widening circles, the extent of which no human wisdom could estimate.

Habits long indulged are not corrected in a day; and there were some who found that it was much easier to go on after the old fashion, than to guard the door of their lips with daily, hourly watchfulness.

One morning Burton Bell, in conversation with some of his acquaintances, made casual mention of the protracted absence of his Uncle Tom, and expressed the fear that he was dead. Now I cannot tell you just how it was, but the remark passed from mouth to mouth, and the careless omission of one word and the inadvertent introduction of another gave new meaning to the half-expressed fear; and, lo! on the following week the "Plainville Argus" con-

tained the announcement of the death of Dr. Thomas Bell, with kind regrets. Little dreaming that the statement was built upon the foundation of his own words, Burton waited on the editor to learn particulars. That gentleman, however, could give no definite information, nothing further than the fact that one of the reporters had gleaned the item somewhere, and he supposed that it was authentic.

There was sorrow among the boys and girls of the Bell family, and a copy of the paper was mailed to their father, who was absent from home. But this was not all. Miss Leah Grimes was sure she had heard Dr. Robinson tell Mr. Elwood that Mr. Philip Bell was quite broken up, and she repeated the fact promptly and frequently, coupled with the oft-quoted remark that "misfortunes never come singly."

"And such a helpless family," she added; "there's Charlie and Burton and Annette and Lucy and Romaine and Alonzo—none of them able to manage for themselves, and their father away from home. Things look very strange, I must say."

Now the doctor had said "broken down" instead of "broken up," and the remark had reference to his health, and not to the condition of his financial affairs, as some thought. Such mistakes sometimes hinge on a slight variation.

But whether the inferences drawn were true or untrue, results followed which influenced all the after

lives of the boys and girls who, despite Miss Grimes's opinion to the contrary, proved capable of managing for themselves, whether wisely or unwisely remains to be seen.

They were gathered in the family sitting-room, "discussing the outlook," as they said, these three boys and three girls, and judging by the expression of countenance worn by one of the boys and two of the girls, the "outlook" was not a very attractive one.

"Now see here, girls—I mean you too, Lon," said Charlie, interrupting himself and laying a hand on the shoulder of the little fellow who was sopping his eyes with his wet handkerchief—"what I want to say is this: the credit of the Bell family is at stake. We have reached a crisis, as they say in the newspapers. If papa's health had not obliged him to leave home for a little while, we might never have had an opportunity to show what kind of stuff we are made of."

"Charlie Bell, I do believe you are glad of our misfortune!" exclaimed a hysterical voice.

"No, Lu, you don't believe any thing of the kind," answered her brother, coolly. "You know I told old Sheriff Smith that papa didn't owe Mr. Loveland a cent, only he was unable to prove the fact satisfactorily; and you know that I kept him out of the house as long as I could. It's no use talking about that. What we have to consider is what to do

next. I suppose you all know that we must get out of here."

"There's the old house at Pleasant Hill," suggested Burton, with a shrug of his shoulders, "if the bats and owls and rats and mice don't dispute possession with us."

"O don't let us go there! I am afraid of bats and owls and things!" interposed one of the little girls.

"Now, Burt, what are you trying to scare the children for?" asked Annette; "I don't suppose there is a bat or an owl about the house; and I have no doubt that we can make ourselves very comfortable there for awhile, at least until papa gets well and we come back here."

"Bravo for you, Net!" said Charlie. "Now what is done must be done quickly, as somebody says, for the sheriff will not sleep always, though he is sound asleep for the night. What I propose is to be up and doing as soon as the moon sets us the example. Come on, Burt. Where is Fidelia?"

"Pottering about in the kitchen as usual, I suppose," answered Burt.

The faithful old servant was just in the act of taking from the oven the last of a dozen savory pies, which were temptingly displayed on the table as the two boys entered.

"I thought I'd better do a little extra baking," she explained. "If Mr. Smith, is going to be here long—"

"Mr. Smith, indeed!" interrupted Charlie, in a very incautious tone. "Fidelia, do you know that Mr. Loveland is stealing, actually stealing papa's property at the hands of that man in there?" jerking his head toward the room where the sheriff was asleep.

Fidelia dropped the pie tin she was holding with a clatter that must have roused the sheriff if he had not been a very sound sleeper, and raised her hands in astonishment.

"I'll tell you what we are going to do, and we want you to help us." Charlie went on: "You know papa owns the old Rectory at Pleasant Hill. Well, we are going there to-night with as many of the things as we can take away. The sheriff hasn't attached them yet; he just got in and lay down, you know. O, if Uncle Tom were only here! Why don't you speak, Fidelia?" he asked, a little impatiently, as the servant stared at him in open-mouthed silence.

"I am going to in a minute," she said, slowly; and presently she did speak, and suggested the impossibility of removing the furniture in the carriage. "I'll tell you, boys," she said, "I'll stand by you while your father's gone. I'll run over and get brother Job and the boys to come with the wagon and haul the things which you will not need for awhile to the warehouse and store them away. He'll do it careful. I've known Job all my life. Now do you take the children to the Rectory, and by and by we will come

with enough furniture to set you up. Do you hear?"

"You're a born general, Fidelia," exclaimed Burton, delightedly. "What time does the moon rise?"

"I don't know precisely, but I guess the almanac will tell," answered Fidelia, in her deliberate way.

"I guess I'll have time to boil a ham and get something ready for those poor motherless dears to eat," she said to herself, producing two big baskets which she placed conveniently near. "I'll put on the ham, and then I'll go and see Job; I can get him to bring some boxes. You just pack your trunks and leave the rest to me," she called out, as the boys went out.

Burton hunted in vain for an almanac. "What is the reason one can never find a thing when he needs it?" he asked, impatiently.

"Because he doesn't take proper care of it when he has it," answered Annette, laughing. "O well, never mind, I know the moon doesn't rise long before midnight. I'll get the children to bed as soon as possible, and then we will begin packing. Don't say any thing about going to-night, or they will not sleep a wink."

The tearful little folks were soothed and petted by the loving older sister, and stupefied with weeping over the misfortune which their imaginations had clothed with unreal terrors, were scarcely able to keep awake long enough for their prayers. With good-night kisses they were tucked in, and their troubles were all forgotten for the time.

Then the trunks were brought in and packed, and the furniture was wrapped by hands that were shaking with excitement; for however coolly the older children might talk of the "hegira," as Charlie called it, the hurried preparations in the silent night, with "the enemy" sleeping under the same roof, gave a weirdness to the proceeding, the effect of which was felt by all.

At last every thing was done that could be done. Even Swift and Fancy stood harnessed to the carriage. Annette was very tired, but too much excited to rest. Job and his assistants were moving in and out of the house as noiselessly as possible, and Mr. Smith slept on; at least Burton reported him as snoring when from time to time he listened at his door.

Annette went out on the piazza where her brothers were watching for the moon. "I wish I felt quite sure that we are doing right, boys," she said, wistfully.

"Nonsense, Nettie! Of course we are doing right," answered Charlie. "Do you think we ought to allow papa to be plundered while he is away? It is bad enough to give up the house, but we can't help that."

"But are we not resisting the officers of the law?" persisted Annette.

"No, we are not," answered Burton. "The old gentleman is taking his nap, and we are taking our traps. Do be reasonable, sis. The whole thing is a piece of rascality. I heard papa talking to Judge Morris about Mr. Loveland, and telling him about something which he could prove by Uncle Tom.

Now that Uncle Tom is dead, that old sheriff has been set on us."

"We might have consulted Judge Morris," said Annette.

"O, yes, so we might," answered Charlie. "He would have rested his elbows on the arms of his chair and placed the tips of his fingers nicely together and said: 'H'm! Ah! well, I will call around sometime to-morrow and see what can be done.'"

"It is growing lighter," announced Burton. "The moon is not far off. Better get the children up, Annette. I'd have started in the dark if I'd only been sure of the road; and it will be light now before we come to the forks and the bad places by the railroad."

Annette said no more, but went up stairs to rouse up the sleepers. Lucy was soon crying again, but she managed to dress herself without much assistance until it came to buttoning her shoes, and then the tears blinded her eyes so that she could do nothing.

"Why did you wake me so early?" she demanded, petulantly. "We are not going to be turned out in the night are we?"

Then little Romie set up a cry that Annette felt sure must have reached the ears of Mr. Smith, and called forth all her efforts to quiet.

"I should think you might be a little more of a woman, Lucy," she said, severely. She at last succeeded in quieting and dressing Romie, with Burton's

voice calling out in a cautious undertone from the foot of the stairs:

"Hurry up, Nettie, the moon is up and the carriage is waiting!"

But when she came to Lonnie, then her troubles seemed to begin in earnest. The little fellow was sleeping so soundly that neither shaking, calling, nor lifting upon his feet had the power to arouse him.

"Hurry up, Net," came Burton's voice again.

"Wake up, Lonnie, wake up!" the sister said, desperately, in the little boy's ear; but Lonnie sank down in a limp heap on the floor, and tucked his chubby fists under his chin.

What was to be done?

"No time to lose now," came the voice from the hall below. Annette was tired and nervous and ready to cry with vexation. She went to the head of the stairs.

"You will have to come up and wake Lonnie; I can do nothing with him," she called down.

"Sh-sh, not so loud," was answered, as Burton came up with long leaps. The moon was now peeping in at the windows and looking like a great eye that had come to spy out their nocturnal proceedings.

"Lonnie, wake up quick; we are going to take a ride. Steady now, stand up till I dress you," Burton said, placing the child upon his feet. But it was of no use. The little white-robed form dropped down and curled itself up like a kitten.

"He sleeps like the sheriff, doesn't he?" said Burton, laughing. "I say, Annette, get a blanket and we'll wrap him up well and dress him after we get there."

The blanket was brought, and rolling the sleeper up snugly, Burton carried him off, calling back:

"Now make haste, girls, and we will be off at once."

"Bring Lonnie's clothes, Lucy; they are hanging on the chair by the window," Annette said, as with shawls and a traveling bag in one hand and leading Romie with the other, she followed, trying to feel like a Spartan matron and not succeeding to her own satisfaction. Lucy dropped the buttoner on the floor, and making a dive at the little garments hanging on the chair, hurried after her sister as fast as her unbuttoned boot would permit.

The night was beautifully clear, and the moonlight fell like a mantle of peace over every thing out of doors. Looking into the house, it showed the deserted rooms in their disorder, the empty beds from which the little ones had just been roused, and the chair by the window, on which lay one little pair of trousers.

The whole affair had possessed something of the nature of an exciting adventure, not without its touch of enjoyment, for both Charlie and Burton; but now that they were about to turn their faces away from the home endeared to them by memories of their mother, and by all the pleasant associations of

early childhood, their feelings underwent a change. Their eyes turned back and lingered on the house and grounds with a look of tender regret.

They had spoken of coming back, but who could tell if that might ever be? It seemed to them, in that parting moment, as if they were indeed losing forever something out of their lives which they had failed to prize as it deserved.

They were going to an untried experience. Their lives hitherto had been guarded from the rough and thorny phases of existence, as well as from its mire and defilement; but what had the future in store for them?

They drove quietly down the silent street with its darkened houses; past the church where they had heard the word of life ever since they could remember; past the cemetery at the outskirts of the town where the remains of their mother rested. Another backward glance and the town and the old home was left behind with the past, and the new home and the untried future was before them.

And had one of these boys or girls asked for the guidance of Heaven? Had one of them run into the strong tower and fortress of God's protection? Alas! how often we forget that "Our times are in his hand."

CHAPTER XII.

"THE HEGIRA."

"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."—Jer. x, 23.

THERE was silence for a time, broken only by the sound of the horses' feet on the smooth road. The occupants of the carriage were busy with their own thoughts. Charlie was the first to rally. He was a bold, confident boy, and such misgivings as he might have harbored in regard to the wisdom of the step they were taking were concealed in his own mind.

"I say, folks," he began, "this is something like seeing life. It savors a little of some of the escapades of kings and queens with their courts from places of danger."

"I expect the Plainville people will think it savors a little of the escapades of criminals, runaways, sneaking off in the dark," answered Burton, laughing.

This was looking at the matter from a point of view that was altogether different; but Charlie would not admit that it had any weight with him.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, confidently.

"Nobody will think of such a thing. We have taken away nothing that does not belong to us."

"Every one will not know that," answered Burton, more from a desire to keep up the argument than from any other reason.

"Well, let them think what they please," replied his brother, stoutly. "So long as my conscience is clear I don't care a straw what people think or say."

"I am sorry the Clarks were away from home; I should have liked to see them before leaving," said Annette.

"Did you bring White-foot?" piped Romie's voice, suddenly breaking into the conversation. The two brothers looked at each other in dismay. White-foot, the Maltese kitten, papa's last gift to Romie, and Solon, the Newfoundland dog, the pride and defender of the household, both left behind!

"Ah, well," said Burton, at length, "Solon is sure to follow us, and we can get White-foot another time. Fidelia will bring her, I expect."

"But Solon is fastened up in his kennel. I shut him in to keep him from bothering about in the way, and waking up the sheriff," he added, as if thinking it well to assign plenty of reasons for his course.

"Fidelia will never think of him, and old Mr. Loveland shall not have him if I am obliged to carry him away on my back."

Charlie drew the reins, and the carriage was brought to a stand-still.

'There is only one thing to be done, and that is to go back," he said.

"O dear! I am afraid the sheriff will get us," wailed Lucy.

Her brother made no answer, but, driving the carriage to the side of the road, leaped out, and proceeding to unharness Fancy, jumped on her back and was off like a ranger, calling back to the others:

"I'll be with you again before you have missed me."

Past the outlying fields and gardens he flew, urging the mare forward with hands and feet, past the orchards and meadows, past the cemetery on the hill, with its white monuments pointing heavenward and looking pure and peaceful in the moonlight, down the silent street, back to the old home. How strange it seemed, how like a wild dream! The loss of sleep and the excitement of the past few hours were beginning to tell on the boy, and in the relaxation he was losing his confident boldness and enjoyment in the "escapade." Halting at the gate, he stole into the grounds of his late home, "like a thief in the night," he said to himself, remembering his brother's words. The house was dark and seemingly deserted. The other party was absent at the warehouse, he supposed. He opened the hall-door softly, and made his way, by the light of the moon, first to the kitchen, where he thought it most probable that White-foot would be found. But he searched in vain. The kitten was not there. He went from room to room, and tills his search was fruitless.

"What has become of that provoking cat?" he asked himself, in desperation. Then he went to the door of the room where the sheriff was sleeping. The snores of which Burton had spoken reached his ear at regular intervals. White-foot might be in that room, but Charlie feared to open the door "lest he might disturb Mr. Smith's rest," he said to himself, with a grim smile.

So he went up stairs. How weird and ghostly it seemed in the silence and the moonlight! Charlie was not a foolish or superstitious boy, but he felt a little nervous as he hunted about the deserted apartments; and when he heard a door open and shut, and saw a tall white figure come out of the opposite room and go noiselessly along the hall to the back chamber, he started and held his breath.

Just at this moment he heard a sleepy mew, and turned to see the object of his search curled up cozily on a chair with the little blue trousers for a bed. It was the work of an instant to seize the kitten, and not much more to make his way down stairs, though noiselessly, for he thought to himself that, ghost or no ghost, it was well to be as quiet as possible.

Short as the distance was down the staircase and through the hall, it seemed a trying journey to the startled boy, and he felt more and more like one walking in a dream. But once out in the open air, with the bright moonlight over every thing, he felt disposed to call himself a dunce for his fright. It

was, in all probability, Mr. Loveland himself "come to look at his new plunder," he said. Hurrying out to the kennel he opened the door, and one short, low whistle to the dog brought out the great, black, splendid-looking fellow, who, indeed, seemed worth coming back after.

Charlie was soon mounted again, and, if he had ridden like a Texan ranger before, he made still faster time on his return. Again he passed the city of the dead, but this time he scarcely thought of it; the delay encountered seemed like a nightmare, and he longed to end it.

Clutching White-foot at the risk of strangulation, he urged Fancy to her utmost speed, and Solon followed close behind, perhaps pondering the meaning of the queer proceeding in his wise black head.

At last the carriage appeared in sight, and if Charlie was eager to be on the journey, those whose part it had been to wait were impatient almost beyond endurance.

"What in the world kept you so long?" asked a chorus of voices.

"O, I had to hunt the house over for that cat," answered Charles; "but I went and came like the express. Now we'll be off again."

The kitten was duly welcomed by Romie, and Solon by all. The harness was soon readjusted, and the boys sprang into their places.

"Lucy," said Annette, "you will be obliged to

get out and sit with Charlie and Burt, and make room for Lonnie to lie down. He is so heavy, and he sleeps like a log."

"How does a log sleep?" asked Charlie.

"Like the sheriff, is better," suggested Burton.

Lucy climbed out grumblingly, and gave a little cry of distress as Burton gave her his hand and pulled her up. Charlie touched the horses sharply, and away they dashed. Lucy continued to whimper, but she had whimpered so much that no one noticed her particularly for a while. Then Burton asked:

"Whatever is the matter, Lu? Did I hurt your wrist?"

"N-n-n-o-o-o," sobbed Lucy. "I t-t-*told* you that I had lost my shoe!"

"Lost your shoe!" echoed her brother. "Where?"

"Back there in the road," whined Lucy.

"O well, let it go. Some poor child will find it who needs a shoe more than you do," said Charlie.

Lucy did not seem to derive much comfort from her brother's logic, and continued to groan.

On and on they went, past farm-houses and cottages, with lawns and gardens, through stretches of woodland, where the moonbeams fell slantingly between the trunks of the big trees, and the shadows lurked darkly among the hollows by the road-side. Then out again into the clear moonlight, where the road wound, like a brown ribbon, in and out among the hills, till it was lost from sight.

"I say, I am getting sleepy. I wonder what time it is?" said Burton.

"O, it is early, not more than two or three," laughed Charlie.

"Look here, old fellow, it will not do for you to go to sleep, I depend on you as guide. You have been to Pleasant Hill, you know, and I never have."

"O, it has been so long that I don't remember much about it," answered Burton. "Better just give the horses their heads, and let them take their own way."

"Were they ever there?" asked Charlie.

"No, not that I know of; but horses have instinct, you know."

"Yes, and boys are said to have reason and common sense, but they don't always prove it," said Charlie, laughing in spite of the dilemma.

"Burt, I'm ashamed of you!"

But Burton, oblivious of all brotherly mortification on his account, was nodding in his seat.

"If you go to sleep and fall out you will be left to share the fate of Lucy's shoe," continued Charlie, unwisely.

"O dear, whatever shall I do, and how shall I get along, without my shoe?" put in Lucy, thus freshly reminded of her loss.

"Pshaw! let it go. You have another pair, I suppose; besides, there are stores at Pleasant Hill," said Charlie.

"But what am I to do when we get there, and I have to get out of the carriage?" argued Lucy, inquiringly.

"O, Burt and I can carry you, or you can jump out and hop into the house like a lame robin."

"I think you are just the meanest boy!" protested Lucy, laughing in spite of herself.

"How are you all back there?" continued Charlie, addressing the occupants of the back seat.

"Romie, Lonnie, and White-foot are all in the land of Nod, and I was about half-way there when you spoke," answered Annette.

Charlie had fully recovered from his fright at seeing the unknown visitor to the room but lately occupied by Burton and himself, and, feeling that the time, the lonely road, and the moonlight would make good accessories to an uncanny tale, he concluded to wake the children up, as he said to himself, with a ghost story.

"Did you see any body at the house when you went back?" asked Annette, as if reading his thoughts.

"Well, I rather think I did," answered Charlie, impressively.

"Whom did you see?" asked his sister.

"Don't ask me to talk about it!" replied the thoughtless boy, with a little shudder. "I never was so frightened in my life. But I'll confess I did see somebody, or something, come out of papa's room and go back to our room."

"Somebody or something?" echoed Annette, in a startled voice.

"Yes, I couldn't see the face, though I saw the figure distinctly in the moonlight," and he gave another shiver.

"How did it look?" asked Lucy, breathlessly.

"It was tall, very tall and white."

"O, Charlie!" exclaimed Lucy, evidently wide awake and as much terrified as her brother could wish. "Do you think it was a—"

"Nonsense," replied Charlie, now beginning to feel ashamed of the part he was playing. "I presume it was Mr. Loveland."

"But Mr. Loveland is short and fat, I saw him when he came to our house before papa went away," objected Annette.

"Well, then, it was somebody else. Of course it wasn't a ghost, you foolish children," continued the boy, reproaching his sisters for having received the very impression which he had aimed to produce. "Don't you go to taking up the idea that the house is haunted, or you will never want to live there again," he concluded, sagely.

Burton had heard the whole story, between two of his brief naps, but felt too sleepy to make any remarks, and the whole party again relapsed into silence. The moonlight at last faded imperceptibly into the dim light of early morning, and Charlie was glad to note the change, hoping soon to see some one of whom

he might inquire the way. But now mile after mile was passed without seeing the sign of a human habitation.

At last the sun looked over the hill-top and showed the heavy-eyed group of boys and girls, who but lately had wished to see no one, now looking anxiously before them for a house or some token of life.

"I don't believe any body lives in this region of country," said Burton, rubbing his eyes and looking about him.

But a little later a turn in the road brought them the welcome sight of a pleasant looking farm-house, near which an old man was feeding cattle in the barn-yard.

"Good morning, sir," said Charlie, "can you tell me how far it is to Pleasant Hill?"

"Well," answered the person addressed, "if you keep on in the direction you are going now, it's about twenty-five thousand miles. I believe that's the distance of the earth's circumference—eh?"

"Now, father, please don't!" exclaimed a woman's voice, and a little old lady, with a motherly face, rose up from a milking-stool on the other side of the big, white cow.

"My dear, you made the wrong turn at the Crossing," she said, "butn ever mind, you look tired, and you shall come in and have some breakfast, and father will feed your horses. Just drive up to the house."

And the old lady started briskly in the same direc-

tion, as if the idea of her invitation being declined had never entered her head.

The horses were tired and hungry, and so were some, at least, of the occupants of the carriage. The old lady came bustling out to the gate to meet them as they drew up.

"Why, children, children!" she said, in a surprised, pitying way, as she scanned the faces one after another, "Where are your parents, my dears?"

"Papa has gone to the sea-side for his health," answered Annette.

"Mamma is dead," added little Romie, softly.

"Ah, poor dears! Give me the baby and come right in."

"The baby" proved to be somewhat heavier than was anticipated, but the kind hostess folded him in her motherly arms, still wrapped in the blanket.

"We were obliged to start in the night, and we couldn't get him awake, so we just wrapped him up and brought his clothes along," explained Annette.

"Exactly," answered the old lady, smiling into the dewy eyes that were just opening to look about curiously.

They all alighted from the carriage, except Annette and Lucy. The former was hunting fussily about among the robes and cushions. At last she said: "Lucy, pray what have you done with Lonnie's pants?"

"I haven't done any thing with them," answered Lucy.

"That is true," spoke up Charlie. "I saw those pants on the chair by Lonnie's bed when I went back after White-foot."

"Why did you not bring them?" asked Annette, in an annoyed way.

"Why, seeing the gh—, I mean looking for Solon and the kitten and every thing made me forget," stammered Charlie.

"Why don't you let me help you out, Lucy?" he added, changing the subject.

The blame of having left the trousers was thus in a measure shifted from Lucy's shoulders, and she felt relieved by the fact, but she had still enough to bear: that shoeless foot which every body seemed to have forgotten but herself.

"I'll just sit in the carriage. I don't care for any breakfast," she said.

"O come in, my dear, and warm yourself anyway; the morning is chilly," responded the old lady.

"I am not very cold," protested Lucy, shivering.

"O, I know," said Burton, suddenly remembering; "she has lost one of her shoes. Never mind, Lu, people sometimes go barefooted in the summer time, and you are not nearly so destitute as Lonnie," he added, laughing. And pulling Lucy out of the carriage, he carried her up to the house and placed her on the piazza just before an elegantly dressed young

gentleman and lady, summer boarders of Mrs. Perkins's. Poor Lucy!

"Never mind, my child," said the old lady, reading her distress in her face. "We are all in our stocking feet sometimes. Come right into my room, all of you."

The party filed in past the summer boarders, and were soon as comfortable as kind hands could make them. Then the busy hostess bustled away and presently returned with a little bundle and a slipper for Lucy.

"I am afraid it will not fit you very well, but it will keep your foot off of the floor," she said, apologetically. Then untying the bundle and unfolding several papers, she produced a little pair of trousers, saying:

"And now, my little man, we will see what can be done for you."

They were of no modern pattern, and showed signs of having been worn at the knees. The old lady's wrinkled hands smoothed them over her lap caressingly as she said:

"He used to wear them, my little boy who went to heaven twenty years ago." She looked at them wistfully for a moment, still patting and smoothing them, and then handed them to Annette.

The young girl thanked her and proceeded to dress Lonnie, who was still staring wonderingly at his newfound friend. The little trousers were very wide and full, reaching to the wearer's feet, and when Lucy

saw her little brother in his new costume, she forgot her own trouble for a moment, and exclaimed:

"O Net, he can't wear those things! He looks like a fright," and she laughed outright.

A little shadow of pain passed over the face of Mrs. Perkins for an instant. Romie joined in Lucy's laughter, much to Annette's shame and mortification. As the two younger girls continued to giggle, Annette tried to reprove them and to express her thanks for Mrs. Perkins's kindness. The disinterested hostess seemed to have forgotten the careless remark, and also to be unconscious of the laughing. She was looking earnestly at Lonnie with a wistful, yearning expression in her kind blue eyes, thinking of the little boy who went to heaven twenty years before.

Mrs. Perkins turned away to see about breakfast, and Annette placed Lonnie in a chair, and with a frowning face turned upon Lucy and Romie, went out to the pump where the boys were washing.

"See here, Charlie and Burt," she said, kindly and earnestly, "whatever you do, don't you dare to laugh when you see Lonnie."

"O, he doesn't care much for being caught abroad in his night-dress," said Burton, indifferently. "He isn't so sensitive as Lu. Poor Lu!" he added, laughing.

"You don't understand," replied Annette. "The lady has given him a pair of very long and very wide pants. He does look funny in them; but don't laugh

if you choke to keep from it. They were her little boy's, and he is dead, and I wont have her feelings hurt. Now, mind," she added, warmly, as she turned back to the house.

Lonnie had just made the discovery of the unusual style of his dress, and called out, "I want my own pants," as Annette came in. The sister tried in vain to divert his attention. The laughter that bubbled up from Lucy and Romie whenever he forgot his trouble for a moment, and walked to the door or window, brought him back to himself and the perplexing problem of the garment which was so unlike that which he had lately been so proud to wear.

Presently the boys came in, and though they both used their pocket-handkerchiefs very freely as they looked from Lucy's No. five slipper to Lonnie's trousers, they managed to produce no more painful impression than that they had both taken violent colds riding in the night air.

Mrs. Perkins, in the kindness of her heart, suggested hot ginger tea; but the boys declined with thanks, telling her that they would soon be better; and, indeed, they presently were when the breakfast of hot coffee and rolls, with fried chicken, ham, and eggs, was served.

Mr. Perkins gave them such minute directions that they felt certain of being able to reach their destination without further wandering, and when they resumed the journey the host and hostess, and even

the two summer boarders, were at the gate to see them off.

A gift of a pair of white rabbits in a box had somewhat reconciled Lonnie to his attire, or rather driven it from his mind, but Lucy's troubles were not over yet. Burton, in his boyish awkwardness, climbed into his seat, and then reached down h is hand to her. Lucy hesitated for a moment, remembering the slipper which she had only managed to retain by thrusting her foot into the toe at every step.

"Let me help you," said the gentleman boarder, coming forward. Lucy reached her place in safety, but, alas! the slipper was left behind With imperturbable gravity the young man placed it in the carriage at the blushing little girl's feet, and lifted his hat to the party as they drove away.

However many be the rules of etiquette, the conventionalities of polished society, true kindness of heart is at the bottom of all genuine politeness. Mrs. Perkins was a plain old lady, whose garments and manners would have caused a smile on the part of some who call themselves cultured, well-bred people of good social standing, but she knew more of true politeness than many such; and the gentlemanly summer boarder, with his faultless dress and manners, could have told that he had learned much in the humble school of that farm-house home. It was a pity that Burton Bell so soon forgot the lesson which he had received, and began to tease Lucy for her mis-

haps as soon as they were well on their way. There are many who, like Burton and Father Perkins, take a great delight in teasing, and others who regard the mistakes of the ignorant with unsparing severity and ridicule, or go through life cutting their fellows with the polished steel of polite indifference; but those who give freely of sympathy and kindness are walking more nearly in the footsteps of the Master.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW HOME.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."—Psa. xxiii, 4.

THE sun was beaming brightly overhead when Swift and Fancy ascended the slope which led into the town of Pleasant Hill.

"I think we will like it," said Charlie, assuringly, as all leaned forward to get the first impression. "There are said to be good schools, and that will be a great advantage."

"H'm," answered Burton, who was not very fond of school.

"I know I shall not like to go to school," said Lucy, "because Miss Maxwell will not be here, nor any of the girls I know."

"There's a nice large church and some handsome residences. I wonder whereabouts the Rectory is?"

"It is over at the back of the town," answered Burton. "You know papa owns the whole farm. The woods are quite near, and it will be jolly fun hunting."

The tired horses were allowed to walk very leisurely as they entered the place, and the party looked

eagerly from both sides of the carriage at the spot which was now to be called home. The journey was over, the "hegira" was accomplished. Charlie had laughingly suggested that it would form an epoch from which to date future occurrences, as the Mohammedans reckon from the time of the flight of their prophet from Mecca; but those boys and girls little guessed how important that date would prove to be to all their after lives.

"What is that man's name that papa used to have in charge of the farm?" asked Burton, musingly. "Oldham, or some such name, wasn't it?"

"No, that wasn't it," said Annette; "it was New—something; Newton, was it not?"

"Newman, Newman—I have it!" said Charlie.

"Well, I knew it was something like that," answered Burton.

"Just hear him!" laughed Charlie. "A new man is something like an old ham, according to Burt. Now the next thing is to find this new man and get the keys to our old house."

A few inquiries enabled them to find their father's agent, a portly old gentleman with keen eyes and a kindly smile. On hearing who the expected tenants of the old Rectory were he rubbed his hands.

"Possible! possible!" he exclaimed. "Philip Bell's children, and as fine a lot of boys and girls as I ever saw! Where is your father, boys? He told me a year ago that he wanted to have the old

place put in repair, and I have been expecting to see or hear from him ever since."

On hearing of his old friend's continued ill-health, he shook his head sympathetically.

"Poor Philip!" he said to himself, "he was never very strong. Well I'll tell you, young folks, you just take the cottage down at the end of this street, and I'll set some men at work on the Rectory and have it fixed up for you in a few weeks."

"Thank you very much," answered Charlie; "but I think we would better go there at once. We can occupy a few rooms in the best part of the house while the rest are being repaired."

Mr. Newman shrugged his shoulders. "Well," he said, "you might try it, but if you don't find the place habitable come down to the cottage."

He produced the keys and pointed out the direction, and, having thanked him, the children turned their faces toward the old Rectory. There were no bats or owls to be seen as they approached, but the great old house wore a deserted, lonely appearance, which Charlie cheerfully declared would soon disappear.

The luxuriant grass and shrubbery showing in the bright sunshine made the picture much more cheerful than it would otherwise have been, and all were glad to escape from the confinement of the carriage. The great brass key was, with some little difficulty, made to turn in the lock, and the front door was thrown open.

The little party gathered on the piazza peered in curiously. They saw a large old-fashioned hall, with wide staircase, and many doors opening right and left.

We shall have room enough, at all events," said Charlie. "We might start a hotel. There used to be a big school here, you know."

They entered the first room on the right, a large, well-lighted apartment with a cavernous fire-place at one end.

The air felt chilly after the warm sunshine outside, and the paper was slipping down from the top, showing that the walls were damp.

"Here, Burt, we'll bring in the trunk for the children to sit on, and then we'll get some wood and start a fire, and we'll feel at home directly," said Charlie, in a loud tone, as if he were trying to scare away something.

The big trunk was brought, and Annette, with Lucy and Romie, perched themselves upon it; but Lonnie, indifferent now to the pattern of his trousers, ran out into the yard and gathered great handfuls of the rank clover for his rabbits, Mrs. Perkins having told him what they liked. He supplied his pets with their favorite food until the little creatures were almost hidden under the mass of green, and Annette was compelled to go to their rescue.

The boys soon came in with a load of dry wood and bark for kindling, and a fire was quickly crackling up the wide chimney.

"There's a good stable and carriage-house," announced Charlie, who seemed bent on seeing all the bright spots in their new position.

"It's a lonesome, dreary, miserable old place, and I don't believe Fidelia and Job are coming," whined Lucy.

"I'm hungry and sleepy," chimed in Romie; and Annette looked tired and troubled.

After a little she took the bunch of keys and made a tour of the rooms on the ground floor, hoping to find a broom, but her search was fruitless. Dust and cobwebs were every-where, but nothing with which to clear them away; and Burt was dispatched to the nearest grocery to get a broom, a dust-pan and brush, and some cakes and cheese for lunch.

Having swept a corner, Annette made a bed on the floor by means of the carriage robes and cushions, with shawls and overcoats, and Lucy and Romie were soon sleeping soundly.

"Annette, you had better go to sleep, too. Your eyes look like two glass paper-weights," said Charlie.

"O I must go to work," answered the older sister, with a housewifely air. "I must sweep out one or two other rooms for storing the things in until we are ready to arrange them. The kitchen and pantry must be swept and dusted before Fidelia arrives with the stores."

So Annette bustled about and got out a big apron and sweeping-cap, and went bravely to work. And

if, looking out from the pantry window, across the green meadow to the woods beyond, where a pair of crows were slowly flapping their black wings overhead and uttering their mournful caws, she dropped a tear or two at thought of the old home, with its familiar, dearly-loved surroundings, and the friends whom she had been obliged to leave without a farewell, none of her brothers or sisters ever suspected the fact.

Hearing the boys coming, she hastily dashed her apron across her eyes, and began to dust the pantry-shelves with great energy.

"Well, Nettie, you are making things look spick and span," said Burt; "but your cupboard is as bare as old Mother Hubbard's."

"Just wait till that boiled ham and all those pies and loaves of bread come in," answered Annette, keeping her face toward the woods where the crows were still circling.

"Well, I'll wait if I can," answered the boy, with an air of great resignation; "but in the meantime I wish I had some of Mrs. Perkins's breakfast-rolls and fried chicken. The blessed old lady! 'I'll keep a spot in memory's garden ever consecrate to thee'—to her, I mean," explained Burton.

"I guess you mean to her fried chickens," suggested Charlie.

"Helloa! there's a wagon. I hope the recruits have come;" and the boys ran out, followed by An-

nette. Sure enough, there were Job and Fidelia, with a heterogeneous load of trunks, boxes, and furniture, followed by Sam and Eph, with another wagon heaped up in the same manner.

Lonnie was already mounted on the gate-post, giving the first welcome to the new arrivals. The big baskets of provisions were first handed out, and then a large jar of butter was produced, with many injunctions of carefulness, and then Job and his aids began the work of carrying in the heavier articles

There was comfort to the home-sick young people in the sight of the familiar faces, and even in seeing the articles of furniture that had made a part of their former home.

When Lucy and Romie awoke from their sound sleep, the setting sun was casting a wide stream of golden light across the floor, and the table, with its snowy cloth, was laid for tea. Fidelia's well-known figure was bustling in and out, adding much to the home-likeness of the scene.

Lucy was glad to see Fidelia, but her neck was stiff from lying too long in one position, and she sat down by the window with her head on one side, grumbling about "those old, hard carriage cushions."

Lonnie was romping in the yard with Solon, and apparently enjoying himself as highly as though he had just stepped out of a fashion-plate. A couple of boys passed, and one of them called out in a laughing voice to the child:

"I say, sis, what makes you wear your frocks so long?"

"I am not sis," replied the little boy, "and they are not a frock; they are pants."

"What is your name?" asked the other boy.

"Lonnie Bell."

"Laura!" replied the tormentor. "I knew you was a girl. That is my little sister's name."

"I said Lonnie!" screamed the little fellow, angrily.

"O, Lottie, is it? Well, Lottie, come over some time and bring your dolls. Bye-bye."

"Annette," grumbled Lucy, as her sister came into the room, "I wish you would make Lonnie stay in the house until you unpack the trunks and get out his clothes."

"What for?" asked Annette.

"Why, those boys were making fun of his pants; I know they were. They were looking at him and laughing," urged Lucy.

Annette looked out. Lonnie was apparently not crushed with mortification. He was again romping with his dog, as if nothing had happened. Then he scampered out to the stable, where Job was feeding the horses, and presently came in, bright and rosy, and ready for the tempting supper spread in the golden glow of the sun now hidden behind the green hills.

"Job says they are going to start as soon as he

feeds and waters the horses," he announced. "Make them stay all night, Fidelia."

"No, honey, they must start right back," answered the servant. "The horses will go fast, and they will soon reach home."

"When shall we go home?" asked the child.

"Well, O, some day, deary," answered Fidelia, rather embarrassed by the unexpected question. "But you have such a nice place here to play with Solon in; better than you had before."

"Yes," admitted Lonnie; "and I have my wabbits, too."

We can find pleasant phases in nearly every situation if we will only look for them, instead of passing by the light and spying out the dark corners.

The first meal in the new home was enjoyed by all, and when the tea-things were washed and put away, Annette and Fidelia went to prepare beds for the night.

If there was a touch of home-sickness all around as the shadows deepened, who can wonder? But Charlie got up a romp with the little ones, and sent Burt to the store for a new pair of shoes for Lucy, and then told his funniest stories until the room resounded with mirth.

Even Lucy regained her spirits for a time, and the talk and laugh went on, while the flames roared up the chimney, for the night was cool.

"Where on earth did you set up your bedstead,

boys?" asked Annette, putting her head in at the door.

"Up stairs in the front room of the south wing—over there," motioning with his head. "It will be just the jolliest den you ever saw when we get our traps all in," answered Charlie.

Annette went back, and she and Fidelia made their way through the halls and intervening rooms until they reached the apartment indicated.

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed Fidelia, "the idea of taking such a journey every time one goes to bed! You just wait here a minute, Nettie, and I'll see if I can't bring those young men to a better state of mind."

She went out, carrying the lamp with her. Annette did not much relish the idea of being left alone in the dark, strange room so far from the others, but thinking it would be foolish and cowardly to object, she sat down to await Fidelia's return. She waited and waited on, and still the servant did not come. She had not dreamed that the journey, as she had called it, would require so much time, and she began to grow tired and nervous. The time passed on, and still she was alone in the darkness. She looked from the window and saw the lights in the houses over in the town, and they looked far away.

Nothing was to be heard except a branch of the great elm-tree creaking against the side of the house as the wind swayed it backward and forward.

Is it not strange that those who have sight, have oftentimes such an unreasoning fear of darkness, while so many hundreds have never seen the sun, and light and darkness are alike to them? This girl of my story waited on and on, her terror growing momentarily as she heard no sound that indicated the return of Fidelia. Then it seeemed to her that a sound reached her ears as of some one crying out as if in distress. She listened intently, her heart-beats painfully distinct. Again the cry came, but from what direction she could not have told. Stories that she had heard or read of haunted houses came into her mind. She started up and groped her way to the door. It was standing half-way open, and her forehead struck its sharp edge in the darkness. The adjoining room was as dark as that which the boys had chosen for their "den," but Annette was determined to try to make her way back to the light. She walked steadily to the place where she thought the door to be, and felt with outstretched hands; but only the cold smooth wall met her touch.

She went on and on, and still there seemed to be no place of egress, though a cold draught blew in her face from some quarter. Then she turned and felt her way back in the other direction, and presently found a door. She fumbled blindly for the knob, and managed, with considerable effort, to pull it open. The darkness was even greater than before, and a little later her way seemed quite blocked up. She

was growing more and more terror-stricken. It all seemed so much like the terrible dreams in which we are imprisoned in dark caves or dungeons, and can find no way out.

Annette's terror was heightened by the recollection of the story related by Charlie of his own experience of the night before. Suppose she should see something horrible? And then there came to her a verse which her father had asked her to learn, just before he went away:

"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Isa. l, 10.

She did not know as she could apply the passage to herself; she felt that her terror of this darkness was foolish, yet the bare thought that the Bible had spoken of the trouble of "walking in darkness," was somehow comforting.

A little later she made the discovery that she had opened a closet door instead of the one leading out of the room. Retracing her steps, she again felt along the wall, and at last found the one of which she had been in search. Then she saw a light in the distance, which came nearer and nearer, and presently Burton and Fidelia appeared.

"Why, Nettie, have you seen a ghost, too?" asked the boy. "You are as pale as a sheet."

"No, I have not seen any thing; that was the

trouble," answered Annette, laughing, and feeling a little ashamed. "I began to think that Fidelia was not coming back."

Then Fidelia explained that a draught of wind had blown out the lamp, and she had lost her way, and had been obliged to call for a light. This, then, was the cry which had so startled Annette.

The room was soon arranged, and Burton kindled a fire on the hearth, which gave a touch of cheerfulness to the "den," and they all went back down stairs, Fidelia still grumbling a little at the distance.

How foolish and foundationless Annette's late terror now seemed to her with light and voices around her. She thought of the strong confidence in God, which could enable the psalmist to say: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me," (Psa. xxiii, 4;) and she wished for a faith so strong, and a hope so bright, that nothing could trouble or alarm her. Ah, she had sorer need of the comfort and guidance of her heavenly Father than she knew!

The boys and girls at the old Rectory at Pleasant Hill were sound sleepers on the first night in their new home. The sun was high and looking in at the windows before any of them arose; yet that night was one to be remembered in all their after lives.

CHAPTER XIV.

FORGOTTEN PROMISES.

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind."—1. Cor. xiii, 4.

THE young people at the old Rectory were beginning to feel at home in their new residence. Most of their life had been spent where the face of nature was much less plainly seen than at Pleasant Hill, and the fields and hills, the wide lawns and green meadows, looked refreshing to their eyes. The grand old elms and maples seemed like pleasant, new acquaintances, ever ready to salute them with waving branches.

As the time passed on they made some other acquaintances in their new home. Burt soon made the announcement that there were "lots of jolly boys" at Pleasant Hill, and some of their neighbors gave them a welcome in little acts of neighborly kindness, which were more expressive than words. These were pleasant enough to most of the children; but Lucy, with her mistaken notions and morbid sensitiveness, seemed to find a sting in every thing that offered. She needed some one wiser than herself to brush away her superficial ideas, and point her to the plain path of duty, overarched with the bright bow of

faith, hope, and charity. It might have made her a braver and a better girl.

One morning a timid ring was heard at the front door, and Lucy answered the summons to find a little girl in a very large green calico sun-bonnet, with a pitcher of milk. She made a queer little courtesy, spilling some of the milk on the piazza floor as she did so, and said:

"I am Mollie Hicks, and mother said, would you please to accept of a pitcher of milk?"

Now, as Lucy afterward admitted, she did not much relish having their milk given to them by little girls in shabby, faded dresses and calico bonnets; but she was very fond of milk, and they had neither seen nor heard of the milkman since coming to their new home.

So she reached out her hands for the pitcher, and invited Mollie into the sitting-room. Burton gave her a chair, and Lucy went to empty the pitcher. On returning she astounded her brother by asking, demurely:

"Will you take off your green calico sun-bonnet?"

Burton stared, and then made his escape from the room as quickly as possible. But Mollie only smiled, and answering, "No, I thank you; mother told me not to stay this time; I will come again," took her leave.

"Did you thank the child for the milk?" asked

Annette, as Lucy returned to the kitchen, where preparations for dinner were going forward.

"I—I guess so," stammered Lucy.

"No, you didn't," answered Burton; "but I'll tell you, Net, what she did do. She said,"—drawing down the corners of his mouth in mimicry of his younger sister's style,—"'will you take off your green calico sun-bonnet?'"

"Did I say that?" asked Lucy, deprecatingly.

"You certainly did. I thought I should explode with laughter before I could get out of the room," answered Burton.

"That comes of your commenting on her bonnet when you came to empty the pitcher," said Charlie. "Mr. Leyburn used to tell us boys that it was unsafe to speak words, or even to harbor thoughts, which we would not like the world to know."

"He used to quote a verse about the birds telling," said Burton. "What was it, Charlie?"

"'A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter,'" answered Charlie. "But he said that the language was figurative, and that we usually betrayed ourselves."

"Just as Lu did," laughed Burton.

"I don't care," retorted Lucy, with a very red face; "I didn't mean any harm, and I am sure her bonnet was of green calico, and she was very poor and shabby looking."

"I have no doubt the milk is just as sweet and

rich as though she had been dressed in silk and velvet," said Annette.

"Well, what made me think about it, Eunice was sitting by the window and saw her come here," answered Lucy.

"What of that?" asked Charlie.

"O she is so very particular about her associates, and always dresses so nicely."

"And is as prim and proper-looking as a little china-faced doll," put in Burt. "Her countenance looks as if she couldn't move a muscle if she wanted to. She is so nice that her mother calls her 'Nicey.' The other day, as I was passing, I heard her call out, 'You Nicey!' I don't know what Nicey had been doing."

"You didn't understand," said Lucy; "Eunice says her mother always gives her name its classical pronunciation."

"O! ah! indeed! Its classical pronunciation," mimicked Burt.

"I think you ought to be ashamed to make fun of any one in that way," said Lucy. "I think she has a real nice name."

"So do I," answered the teasing brother; "but I don't think I shall ever call her 'You Nicey.' It sounds too much like a reprimand, and I suppose such a very proper, particular person never requires any thing of the kind."

"Burton, did you order those shingles last week?"

asked Charlie, as his brother was about leaving the room.

"No; I quite forgot them," was the answer; "but I'll be sure to see Mr. Elbright to-day. Henry Carlton and I are going out in that direction on a squirrel hunt."

"Better put off the squirrel hunt and go directly to the mill," advised Charlie. "If you get in company with Henry you will never think of the shingles again, and Mr. Jeffreys said they should be put on at once. Besides, he is waiting to do the work, you know."

"All right; I'll attend to the matter without fail," answered Burton.

A little later he sallied forth with his gun on his shoulder, and Henry Carlton met him at the end of the lane. The boys set out in high spirits, intent on a day's sport. They did not return until late in the evening. Burton's game-bag was found to be well filled, and the squirrels were dressed for breakfast. No one said or thought any thing about the shingles, and Burton, tired with his long tramp, retired early.

About nine o'clock some one knocked vigorously at the door, and Charlie opened it to see Mr. Jeffreys, the carpenter.

"What about that work?" he asked, a little gruffly. "I put off a job I had on hand to put on those shingles, and I'll be obliged to do it now or let it go till next month."

"Burt ordered the shingles to-day," answered Charlie; "I suppose they will be here to-morrow."

"You ought to have got them a week ago," answered Mr. Jeffreys. "The weather is bound to change in a day or two;" and, making this remark his farewell, he disappeared in the darkness.

"I do wish Burt had ordered those shingles when he was first told to do so," said Charlie, in a vexed way, when he returned to the sitting-room. "Mr. Jeffreys is out of humor about the delay, and thinks the fine weather is about over. I hope it will not rain for awhile."

"Did Mr. Elbright promise to send the shingles at once?" asked Annette.

"I don't know," answered Charlie, with a start, suddenly remembering that he had not spoken to Burton about the matter on his return.

Hurrying up to the room where he and his brother slept, he found Burton in the deep sleep of fatigue, and snoring lustily. Shaking the sleeper unceremoniously, Charlie asked:

"Did you order those shingles to-day, Burt?"

Burton snored on. Charlie shook him still more violently.

"I say, Burt, did you order those shingles?"

At last, after repeated shakings, Burt started up.

"What do you want?" he asked, shortly.

"Those shingles," replied Charlie.

"I haven't got any shingles!" was answered, im-

patiently; and then Burton sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Did you order those shingles to-day?" repeated Charlie, with unnecessary emphasis, for his brother was now wide awake.

"Yes—no," stammered Burton; "I forgot it entirely. Went right past Elbright's, too. I'm real sorry, Charlie; I'll go the first thing in the morning."

"I see it will never do to trust you to do any thing but enjoy yourself and have a good time. You are too selfish to care for any thing else," answered Charlie, angrily, as he went out and slammed the door.

"Dear me, how the wind is blowing!" said Fidelia, as Charlie flung one door after another shut behind him, and she went to look after the shutters. In the meantime Charlie procured a lantern and a stout stick, and announced his intention of "settling that shingle question once for all."

"O I would not think of going to-night!" protested Annette.

"No, indeed," called out Fidelia from somewhere in the darkness; "there is a big storm brewing by the way the doors and shutters are slamming about this draughty place."

Charlie knew well what kind of a storm it was which had caused the noise; but he offered no explanation. Indeed, the storm was still raging.

"I told Mr. Jeffreys that the shingles would be here to-morrow, and if they are not, it will not be because they have not been ordered," he said, doggedly. "You can all go to bed as usual. I will let myself in." And off he went.

Burton, although he had no suspicion of his brother's intention, was feeling very uncomfortable at the thought of his remissness. He was angry with himself and angry with Charlie for being angry with him. He could not put the matter out of his mind, but lay tossing about and wishing that his brother would come back and settle down, so that he could go to sleep.

But Charlie did not come, and he tossed and turned until he was tired out, and at last forgot every thing and was snoring again.

As for Charlie, he made his way the best he could by the light of his lantern along the lonely, deserted road, past farm-houses, where the lights were disappearing, then through the wood path over the hill, which would shorten his journey, he thought, but which really made it longer, as he lost his way and was compelled to go back to the road. The way seemed very long in the darkness and silence, but at last the mill loomed up against the background of starlit sky, and he knew that Mr. Elbright's residence was not far beyond.

As he was about to enter the grounds he heard the barking of a dog; but, grasping his stick more firmly,

he resolved to let nothing drive him from his purpose, after the toilsome journey he had made.

Boldly entering the yard, he took the path to the front door and knocked loudly. He heard no response except the barking of the dog, who now appeared on the scene, and not only one, but two—yes, three, as another pair of fiery eyes came around the corner of the house.

This was more than our hero had expected, and hastily setting down his lantern and dropping his stick, he sprang for the nearest tree. The branches grew at a considerable distance from the ground, and when he had reached a place of safety and comparative comfort, he found himself almost on a level with the upper windows. One of these was opened a little later, and a head appeared.

"Who is there?" was demanded.

"Excuse me, sir, I am not there, but here," answered Charlie's voice quite close to the questioner.

"Well, so I perceive," replied Mr. Elbright. "What is your business?"

"I want six thousand of your best shingles sent to Pleasant Hill, to the old Rectory, to-morrow, cash down on delivery," answered Charlie.

"Well, I don't know," replied Mr. Elbright. "Be quiet, Turk, and take yourself off!"

The dog slinked away, followed by his companions.

"I sold out my stock to some builders out at Overton this evening. I could easily have sent them to-

day if you had given your order in time. I guess you will be obliged to wait now for a week or two. You are Bell, I believe."

"Yes, sir," answered Charlie.

"If you had left your order when you passed this morning I could have filled it at once. I know your place needs shingles badly."

"It was my brother who passed this morning. I told him to stop, but he forgot it," answered the boy, his angry feelings rising anew at the thought of Burton's carelessness and the results following.

"Well, I will do the best I can for you if you give me the order," continued Mr. Elbright.

"I can do no better," answered Charlie. "There are none in town."

"Poor fellow! to have come all the way from town in the night only to be disappointed!" said a compassionate voice in a cautious undertone. "Do ask him to come in and stay till morning, Rufus."

"No, I thank you," answered Charlie, forgetting that the words were not addressed to him; "I must go back at once. Good-night."

He slipped down from his perch, and recovering his lantern and stick, retraced his steps. He had escaped the dogs, but had hurt his hands on the rough bark of the tree, and was so tired and sleepy that he felt in no very amiable mood.

"It is absolutely ridiculous, my not being able to go through that little strip of woods. I'll go back

that way or spend the night in trying," he said to himself, impatiently. So he struck out for what seemed the most probable route, and went on and on until he was completely tired out.

He knew, at last, that unless he had changed his course he must have passed through the stretch of woodland between the town and the saw-mill long since. So he sat down to rest and think. His lantern cast strange shadows, and showed him the huge trunks of the trees standing around him like giant sentries, hedging in his way on every side.

He almost wished that he had stopped at Mr. Elbright's until morning, but very likely Annette and Fidelia would sit up for him, although he told them not to do so. He must make another effort. At last, after what seemed hours of aimless wandering and stumbling about, he came out into the road at the opposite end of the town from that by which he had left it.

The house was silent and dark, except for the hall lamp. He heard the clock striking two as he went up to his room. Burton was sound asleep, and as Charlie looked at the flushed, boyish face, as he lay with one arm thrown over his head, despite his own weariness and vexation over his fruitless effort, he thought, with a little pain, of his last words to his brother, those stinging words which had been prompted by impatience and anger.

My reader, did you ever reflect that somewhere,

sometime, somehow, we shall speak our last words to all those around us? To our dear ones alike with the strangers who casually cross our paths? To some, perhaps, they have been already spoken, and had we known that they would be our last, might they not have been different in many ways?

A little boy having spoken some light and careless words to a darling sister, on bidding her good-night, went afterward to her room to cover them over with words which were more in accord with the love he felt for her, for, said he, "*They might have been my last words to Ella.*"

Ah, let us see to it that our "last words" shall be sweet and loving ones!

Some thought like this was passing through Charlie Bell's mind as he stood looking at his brother. True, Burton had been thoughtless, careless, and untrustworthy; but the very thought of his brother's fault seemed to stand before him as an accuser against himself.

How clearly he remembered a conversation with his father not long before his departure, in which Mr. Bell had said:

"Charlie, my boy, I leave the others in your care. Try to fill my place to your brothers and sisters while I am away."

How proud the words had made him! How eagerly he had promised to do his best! And how had he kept his promise? Would his father have spoken

and acted as he had done but a few hours before? His failure in this instance recalled others of like character. It was now Charlie's turn to toss restlessly, with the words of Scripture ringing in his ears:

"Wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." Rom. ii, 1.

CHAPTER XV.

DISAPPOINTMENT AND SORROW.

"Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."—Job v, 7.

PERHAPS one of the greatest of the minor trials of life is that of waiting. Looking forward to something and being disappointed day by day. Even in matters of no very great weight, the delay is often trying, and we have need to look to the source of all strength for grace and patience, and when we are expecting the arrival of a long-absent friend, or even a letter, the contents of which are "tidings from a far country," every new disappointment seems like a blow.

Then comes the grasping at the hope which the morrow holds out. We lose the present in our longing for its coming, only to find it as empty of the wished-for good as was the day before.

The trains came into Pleasant Hill, and brought the great leathern mail-bags that in their fullness seemed to hold enough for all, and the crowd surged in and out of the post-office, and many expected or unexpected letters were received; but the lives of the young people at the old Rectory were divided between anticipation and disappointment, until there

came to some of them the heart-sickness that is born of hope deferred.

Charlie had written to his father on the day following their arrival at their present home, and his letter had been followed by one from Annette, and another from Burton. Many days had since elapsed, but as yet they had received no reply.

"I know papa will write saying that we have done just right. We are sure to get a letter to-morrow," Charlie had said, confidently, from day to day. But the letter did not come, and even he grew silent and gloomy. Then Annette exerted herself to try to kindle a little hope.

"Perhaps papa is coming home, or he may not have been quite so well and put off writing. We shall certainly either see him or hear from him soon."

The younger children were too young to feel so deeply in regard to the letters, but they often wished that their father would come home. As for Burton, the acquaintances he had formed among the boys of Pleasant Hill interested him very much, and helped him to pass over what would otherwise have been a very trying time. Charlie and Annette found some employment to fill up many of the weary hours, but they did not feel much pleasure in any thing. They had heard from their father daily while at Plainville, and it seemed to them as if they had, by their own act, cut themselves off from all communication with him, in leaving home without first consulting him.

The brother and sister both wrote again, but still no tidings came.

Ah, how wise it is for us to learn to lean upon the strong arm of our heavenly Friend for support in all the trials of life! Even were it not true that our Father's love and care is our safest refuge from the storms of earth, there comes a time to all of us when we have no other refuge, no other covert from the windy storm and tempest of sorrow and bereavement.

Another week passed slowly day by day, and Saturday evening came.

"If there is not a letter to-night, how shall we endure until Monday?" asked Annette, with a sigh. "Please go over early, Burt; Charlie has gone up to Mr. Newman's to find out if he has heard any thing from papa. Do get a letter this time. I don't believe I can wait any longer," she added, trying to speak lightly.

"All right," answered Burton. "I'll bring you one if I am obliged to write it myself."

Annette watched her brother as he went down the street with his quick, swinging step, and then, to pass away the time, her Saturday duties being all complete, she went to the room which had been arranged for her father, "papa's room," as even little Lonnie had learned to call it, and dusted the furniture, re-arranging the mantel ornaments, putting little touches here and there, and even drawing up the easy-chair before the

fire-place where the wood and kindling were laid ready to be lighted.

"O, if he would only come to-night!" she said to herself as, unconsciously, she laid her hand on the family Bible, from which he had been wont to read to them the blessed truths by which he ruled his life.

How well it had been for her if she had only learned to know the God of her father, the gracious One of whom David has said: "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."

She walked about the room in a state of nervous excitement, looking at the pictures that had been his favorites, and the volumes that she knew he had loved, and which she had tried to arrange in the shelves as he had left them in that other home.

The light was growing dim, and she went out, closing the door behind her softly, as if there had been some one there who must not be disturbed. She met Lucy in the hall, and they went to the front door and strained their eyes to catch a sight of Burton. Then Annette remembered that the train had not yet come, but there was Charlie, and the sisters hurried out to the gate to hear what he might have to say. Charlie had brought no tidings, and the three sat down to wait for Burton.

All were silent, busy with their own thoughts. The little ones, tired with a long ramble, had gone to rest, and nothing was heard except a whip-poor-will's note in a clump of trees not far from the house.

Then after more waiting they heard the whistle of the locomotive, and as the darkness grew and deepened, the lights twinkled out here and there in the town. The time dragged slowly on. Once or twice they thought that Burton was coming; but no, it was only a passer-by.

At last he came, but walking at a provokingly leisurely pace, the impatient watchers thought.

"No letter yet?" asked Annette, dejectedly, as he sat down on the steps without a word.

Burton started. "Why I forgot to go to the office. The train wasn't in yet, and Will Miles asked me to go down to the river to see his new boat," he explained.

"And you have been fooling about down at the river while we have been waiting to hear from the mail!" exclaimed Charlie, angrily.

Alas, alas for the good resolutions of both these boys!

"What was the use for me to loaf around the office when the train hadn't come?" retorted Burton.

"The train came half an hour ago," replied Charlie.

"Well, I'll go," answered the delinquent, as his brother sprang to his feet; but Charlie hurried away without making any reply.

"I know there is no letter there without asking," muttered Burton, feeling very uncomfortable over this new remissness and the blame which he had

incurred. "I have been hanging about the post-office nearly half of my time ever since we came to the Hill," he said, falling into the phraseology of some of the boys of the vicinity, "and I have asked for letters, and been told there are none, until I am ashamed to look the postmaster or his clerk in the face."

Then there was silence again. Even Lucy was too miserable to grumble. Charlie took the nearest route to the office, and hurried along at his utmost speed. Once he ran against a man as he turned a corner, and was asked, curtly,

"Is there a fire, young fellow, or are you in a hurry for the doctor?"

Charlie did not even wait to apologize. He inquired for letters, and waited breathlessly while the polite, but unconcerned, official shuffled over the contents of the B box.

There were envelopes large and small, orange, pale buff, and white. There was a slight pause now and then, and a little closer scanning of some illegible address, that seemed to offer some hope to the waiting boy, and then the letter that might have brought news to the aching hearts was passed by with those which had gone before.

"Charles Bell!" called out the young man at last, as coolly as if it were a very commonplace affair—as, of course, it was to him.

"Yes, sir," answered Charlie, eagerly, and reached out his hand.

"Three cents due," announced the clerk, with his characteristic coolness.

Charlie produced a dime, and, without waiting for his change, snatched the letter and hurried out to the street lamp away from the crowd.

The envelope was not addressed by his father's hand, but he recognized the post-mark at a glance, and he tore it open with nervous fingers. What did it mean? His last letter to his father, and then a note in the same strange hand as the address. He read it over once, twice, thrice, in a kind of numb terror, and then he knew he could not be mistaken. The long silence was explained. The letter from father, for which they had waited and longed, would never come. They were doubly orphaned now.

Charlie hurried home as in a dream. His brother and sisters had gone indoors, and the lamp was lighted. He hoped they would not say one word to him. He felt as if he could not bear to speak. He carried the letter conspicuously open, and something in his face startled them all into silence. He laid the sorrow-burdened missive silently on the table, and, hurrying out, groped his way in darkness through the "long journey," as Fidelia had called it, to his own room, and threw himself on the bed in an abandon of pain.

He did not weep. It seemed to him that the tears would never come to his eyes again. He only thought and thought until it seemed to him as if he should

go wild. Had he been near enough to hear his sisters' cries and moans, he would have roused himself to go to them and try to comfort them, but he was too far away, and he thought only of his own bereavement.

Could it be possible that he had been fatherless all these weeks since coming to Pleasant Hill? The date of his father's death, as given by the proprietor of the Glen House, was the very same as that of their flight from Plainville.

Charlie Bell never knew how long he lay there with dry, burning eyes and the pain of his loss pressing on his heart like a load that was too heavy to be borne. It seemed to him like a long, long time. He could not weep, and he did not pray. He only tossed himself about and groaned.

Then the door opened, and Fidelia came in with a light. Her eyes were red with weeping.

"Poor boy! my heart aches for you," she said, laying her hand on his head in the way she had used to do when he was a little child; "but try to be a man, Charlie, for the sake of the others. You will have to take your father's place to them now, you know. Try to do as he would wish you to do."

She could not have spoken wiser words, unless she had been able to appeal to a wish to please his God.

Charlie arose, and followed her without a word. Romie had been awakened by her sisters' voices, and, frightened and bewildered, added her cries to theirs

without at all understanding the dark shadow that had fallen across her young life.

Little Lonnie was as yet happily unconscious of all troubles except such as come and go lightly in the world of dreams. I will not pain my reader by dwelling at length upon the scene at the old Rectory on that sad Saturday night. The grief of those boys and girls, so poignant in its freshness, would be softened by time; but to-night there seemed no ray of light or joy for them in all their after lives. How small and trivial little every-day annoyances seemed compared with this vast mountain of grief which had fallen upon them! Alas! they had no experimental knowledge of that One who "comforteth as a mother."

They all slept at last the sleep of exhaustion, and the faithful servant knelt by each bedside and offered earnest prayer to the God of the fatherless in behalf of those young hearts so sorely stricken.

CHAPTER XVI.

A VISIT OF CONDOLENCE.

"O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill."—Psa. xliii, 3.

HAD there been some faithful ones, even a single, earnest, sympathetic follower of the Master, to go to those bereaved ones in their sorrow and darkness, and point them to the Source of all consolation, what a Christ-like work might have been accomplished!

But the well-to-do church, with its handsome place of worship, was at present without a pastor, or even a prayer-meeting or Sabbath-school. Alas for the Church whose candlestick is so near to being removed out of its place!

There were, doubtless, devout and sincere Christians in the community, but either they did not know of the bereavement of the lonely young people at the old Rectory, or they thought that others would go to them with the balm of consolation. Ah, how prone we are to delegate our duties to others!

Life went on just as before. The great factory, with its noisy wheels and looms, rang its sonorous bell to call the operatives to their work, and then again to release them; the big flouring-mill blew its

whistle to mark the hours of labor; the trains came and went, and busy, active men and women, and happy, thoughtless children passed up and down the streets unknowing or uncaring that there were those in their midst for whom life could never be the same again; that there were young hearts not far away that were borne down with a sorrow so heavy, a grief so painful, that they could see no brightness around or before them.

They did not care to go to the post-office now. The letter for which they had waited day after day, with such trembling expectancy, would never come. They could receive no more messages from their father, and that thought was one of the bitterest ingredients in their cup of sorrow, as it often is to those whose friends have passed beyond the confines of this world. They knew that their father was in heaven, but, O, he seemed so far away, and they could not hear from him! Have we not all yearned for some sign from the one who has lovingly walked with us here, and has tenderly remembered us when absent from our sight? If only we might hear in the well-known voice, or read in the familiar hand, but the words, "Well and happy," or "I do not forget you," or "I love you still," the message would come as cold waters to a thirsty soul.

But, O! the sudden unbroken silence, the absence which is not to be measured by weeks nor months nor years, but must go on to the end of life; and yet

all this is well or our Father would not have permitted it to be so. "Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal," and God has revealed enough for our peace and happiness if we will but receive it. He has told us of the house of many mansions in which Jesus went to prepare a place for his followers; of the city whose builder and maker is God; of the light and gladness, the songs and halleluiahs of the redeemed, the joys that language fails to describe; the blessedness that eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor the heart of man conceived.

Surely we know enough if we will but receive it, and it is not only needless, but wrong, to wish to pry with our earthly vision into the spirit world, or listen for the voices that are now attuned to the song of Moses and the Lamb. We need not fear that they will forget us, and, though they may not return to us, we may go to them when God shall call us away from earth.

Charlie Bell was the first to rally from the stupor of grief that followed the first keen blow of sorrow, as he had been the first to rally from the effects of that blow when it had fallen. At his suggestion he and Burton made a trip to Plainville to consult with their father's old friend and lawyer, Judge Morris.

They promised to return as soon as possible, in two or three days at the farthest, and Fidelia assured them that they might trust her, telling them that

she would stand guard over those who were left behind.

On the day following the departure of the boys, a lady called at the Rectory, whom Annette had never seen before. She introduced herself as Miss Towne, and was very kind and friendly. She alluded delicately to the sorrow that had come to the family, expressing her sympathy, and then, after a short pause, said:

"I am a milliner and dressmaker, Miss Bell, and I have come to you, since you are strangers, thinking, perhaps, you might desire my services in the way of mourning hats and dresses."

"Thank you," answered Annette, "but I do not think we will require any. Papa was not pleased with the custom of wearing mourning. He told us when mamma died that we could best respect her memory by trying to be resigned and cheerful for her sake and the sakes of those who remained; and he kept a vase of fresh flowers always before her portrait when flowers were to be had."

"Ah, how beautiful!" said Miss Towne, appreciatingly; "and do you still observe the custom?"

In response to the question Annette invited her visitor to go with her to "papa's room." It was a little strange that she should have done so. It seemed a sacred place in her eyes. No one but she had entered it since that sadly remembered evening on which she had fondly dreamed that her father might return. Had she taken her brothers and sisters with

her in her daily visits to the apartment which contained so many reminders of the dear, departed one, and talked to and with them of their mutual loss, it would in time have softened the bitterness of grief for all of them. But no, she had held the room sacred to her own sorrow, and here she was inviting an entire stranger to visit the hallowed spot.

The portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Bell were hung side by side between two of the windows, and on a table before them stood a large vase filled with the choicest flowers which the garden afforded.

"Ah, how beautiful, how appropriate!" repeated Miss Towne; "and you will find a comfort in perpetuating the offering."

The words uttered softly by this stranger of an hour ago fell soothingly on the wounded heart of the lone girl, and she talked to her more freely than she had yet done of her father's death.

"If we could but have received one more letter, if we could have had but a farewell message, it would not be quite so hard to bear. Fidelia tells me that I must not dwell too much on that thought, that the messages of the dying need not be more precious or comforting than the known feelings and wishes of a life-time."

"Who is Fidelia?—your servant?" asked Miss Towne, a little coldly.

"Rather our friend than servant," answered Annette.

A very good woman, I have no doubt; but I think she is mistaken. The latest wishes of our dead should be held sacred in the highest degree."

"If we but knew them," added Annette, with a sigh.

"It is in our power to know them if we will," was answered, calmly; and then, as Annette looked at her in questioning wonder, she went on to inquire the time of Mr. Bell's death.

Annette gave the date, and added, tearfully:

"It was the very same evening on which we left our old home."

Miss Towne gave a little start, but quickly recovered herself, and folded her hands tranquilly.

"And can it be that you received no sign, no token of his death?" she asked, after a little pause "Did no member of the family either hear or see any thing unusual on that night? Can you recall nothing that might have been a warning?"

Annette's thoughts flew back to the story which Charlie had told her of the tall, white figure that came from his father's room and vanished down the hall in the moonlight. She had never alluded to the subject, even to Fidelia, and she shrank from doing so now; but she related the circumstance briefly, with a pale face and faltering speech.

Miss Towne talked soothingly, and assured her that she need not be at all troubled if she were only willing to exert her strength.

"It appears that you did receive a visitation, as I felt convinced you must have done," she said, "and no doubt a message would have followed if opportunity had been given."

Annette sat gazing at her visitor in silence.

"You need not be surprised or frightened at the idea, my dear," Miss Towne continued. "I have known of many such instances in my experience as a spirit medium. Such things are not at all uncommon. When survivors really desire to receive messages from, and to hold communication with, their dear ones in the spirit world, there is no difficulty in doing so, and the satisfaction is *very* great."

Now Annette Bell had never heard much about what is generally denominated "Spiritualism," and the little which she had heard had not been favorable to belief. But why should this kindly-speaking, sympathetic lady seek to deceive her? What motive could she have in so positively asserting her knowledge of these things? She was the first who had come to the sad heart with messages of condolence, and her words were the more readily credited from the fact that her expressions of sympathy had wrought upon the young girl's gratitude.

"If you wish to receive the message which your father is evidently anxious to impart, I can, I think, by working late in the shop to-night, give you my assistance on to-morrow evening. It is very exhausting to my strength, but I am willing to endure

much in the good work which has been given me to do."

"I am afraid," stammered Annette, "that it will not—"

"O, there is nothing to fear!" interrupted Miss Towne; "it is merely a question as to whether you wish to please your father, to hear from him again, as you said you wished you could do, to learn whether he approves of your coming here, of which you say you feel some doubt. It is simply this: Do you desire to hold communication with him, or refuse to comply with his wishes?"

"O, Miss Towne, I wish to please my father always!" exclaimed Annette, bursting into tears. "If you are sure—"

"I cannot be more sure. I have given years to the work of comforting the mourning," was answered with a caress.

Annette leaned her head against her professed friend, and let her tears flow unrestrainedly.

"I must make one trifling stipulation, my dear child. You are to mention the subject to no one. There are some slight arrangements to be made. I will call early and attend to them. This must be the room. I have no doubt as to the result. Are you sure," she went on hurriedly, "that your love for your father will enable you to carry the matter through? Are you sure that you wish to know his will?"

"I am sure I do, but—" began Annette, tremblingly.

"Very well, then, it is settled, and I will not delay you longer. Good-bye until to-morrow evening. Keep a brave heart, my love; there is no reason for feeling at all nervous." And kissing Annette tenderly, she took her leave.

To describe Annette's feelings during the remainder of that day and the next would be impossible. She hoped and feared. She shrank from the secrecy, the bare mention of which should have been enough to warn her that all was not right.

Mr. Bell had been a person of great candor and a strong advocate of straightforwardness and open dealing in all things, and had strenuously endeavored to inculcate in his children the principles by which he ruled his own conduct in his intercourse with others.

If any thought of all this came to Annette she thrust it aside. She was in the deep waters of affliction and hungry for consolation, while the disordered state of her nerves made her an easy prey to the designing, if such Miss Towne should prove to be.

That lady called on the following afternoon, according to appointment, and requested Annette's permission to arrange the room and "test its spiritual occupancy before attempting the *séance*." Annette gave her the key, and waited tremblingly in her own apartment until she should be called. She had told

Fidelia and Lucy that she expected company in the evening, and requested them to keep the children with them. Lucy was glad to escape meeting visitors, and asked no troublesome questions; but Fidelia glanced at the older sister inquiringly. Annette looked troubled, but made no further explanation, and Fidelia, true to her name, exerted herself to entertain the little ones, and they enjoyed a happier evening than they had known for weeks. The daylight faded and the stars came out one by one. Grim shadows fell about the house from the great trees near it; and to Annette, sitting alone in the parlor, the silence became oppressive. But more oppressive still was the impression that now refused to be thrust aside, that she had agreed to take part in a proceeding which, were her father living, he would not approve. She had a half-formed notion of drawing back even yet; but was it not too late? If she only knew the truth about this doctrine in which Miss Towne seemed to believe so firmly! Was it, indeed, true? and, if true, might it not be the work of the powers of darkness? But, on the other hand, she told herself, it might be true and right, and she longed so sorely to hear something from the dear departed one. She was so lonely, so comfortless and unhappy, and Miss Towne was the only one who had sympathized with her and tried to comfort her. She forgot the faithful one who had served her father and his motherless children with disinterested kindness all those

years, and whom she had now set aside for the acquaintance of a day. The time would come when she would remember the injunction: "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not."

Again, there was a better Comforter than any earthly friend, had she but sought him. There were more tender words of consolation than any human lips could utter, had she but searched for them.

"For the Lord will not cast off forever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Lam. iii, 31–33.

The darkness deepened, and the clock on the mantel ticked loudly in the silence. Then came a low tap at the door, and Annette went to open it, her hands shaking and her limbs trembling under her.

"Come, my dear," said Miss Towne, re-assuringly, and putting her arm around the quivering form; "our friends are waiting. I am not sure that there will be a materialization to-night, but I feel confident that you will hear a voice."

Annette found her father's room so metamorphosed as to be scarcely recognizable. A thick curtain was hung before the bay-window, and the portraits of her father and mother were covered with some heavy black stuff that showed only the outlines of the frames beneath. This struck Annette, even then, as somewhat incongruous, in view of Miss

Towne's avowed appreciation of bright and cheerful associations.

A single lamp was burning on the mantel, with the light turned low, leaving the room in dim shadow. Half a dozen persons were seated near the door. Annette was shown to her place, and Miss Towne took her stand not far from the bay-window.

Unbroken silence reigned for some time, and then the "medium" asked, in a low, thrilling tone:

"Do you not hear voices?"

All listened attentively, and presently there seemed to come to Annette, from behind the curtain, an indistinct, murmuring sound that gradually became more clear. The voice sounded strange and unearthly to her ears. Then she heard her nearest neighbor whisper:

"O, that is my brother's voice! I should know it among a hundred!" and she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. The voice grew more and more distinct, and presently, in a kind of chanting tone, clearly came the words: "The wall of separation is not thick and impenetrable, as you deem it. We walk beside you day by day. You may hear our voices if you listen, and if your faith were stronger we would appear before you in our old familiar forms. Go on to perfection, and brighten your existence and ours by holding frequent communication with us. Farewell."

Annette shuddered. Could it be that she had indeed heard a voice from the spirit world? Miss

Towne sat down and leaned her head on her hand, as though prostrated with fatigue. After a time she again arose in the dim light. She turned up the lamp, and said:

"I wish to prove to all that no imposture is being perpetrated. You will please observe that the alcove is empty, and the window securely fastened."

She drew aside the curtain and invited examination. One or two went forward and returned apparently well satisfied. As for Annette, she felt unable to stir from the spot where she was sitting.

"No chance for trickery there," said one of the investigators, as he passed her chair in returning to his place.

Again the curtain was drawn and the lamp adjusted, and again the company waited in silence.

"Listen!" said Miss Towne, suddenly, holding up her finger. Again came the indistinct murmur, gradually swelling. Then came the words:

"My daughter. My little woman so like her mother."

The voice sounded strange, but the words were very familiar to Annette Bell's ears; they were the very expressions which her father had been wont to use to her.

"You have done well," the voice went on. "You are with true friends. Trust them unreservedly."

It occurred to Annette, even at this critical juncture, that the voice was not only unlike her father's,

but at times strikingly similar to that of the deceased brother of the lady at her side. Then there was silence, and, though the listeners waited long, nothing more was heard. Miss Towne again turned up the light and came to Annette.

"My darling, you are not frightened, are you?"

The girl was very pale, but she protested that she was not alarmed.

"Then, if you would like, we will try again, and perhaps the result may be more satisfactory. If we can secure materialization it will be likely to take place in the bay-window, and I would like to make the spot secure from any chance of intrusion from without as well as to take precaution against any possible suspicion of imposture. Can you get me a strong padlock, my dear, that we may doubly secure the shutters?"

Annette went out and stealthily obtained the lock which was used in fastening the store-room, which opened on the back porch and was carefully guarded by Fidelia. She knew it would leave the supplies exposed, but there seemed no alternative. On her return Miss Towne beckoned her to the window, and she saw the hasp of the lock passed through the staple. The key was turned in the socket, and then returned to her keeping. She observed again that the recess was quite empty, but for the table which had stood before the portraits. It, too, was draped in a heavy black cover, not long enough, however, to con-

ceal any thing beneath, and the vase of flowers was placed upon it as before.

"That is all, I believe," said Miss Towne, looking around with a weary air, "unless, my dear, you have some little trinkets, gifts from your father which you might wear to-night to please him."

"I have my bracelets and my watch and chain, but papa said I was not to wear them until I come of age," answered Annette.

"Then do not wear them under any consideration. Study his wishes completely," said Miss Towne, fervently.

Annette went back to her chair. The light was softened as before, and Miss Towne again took her stand beside the curtain. A long silence followed. Then the curtain trembled slightly as though the wind were blowing on it. The medium stood with folded arms looking at Annette. There was another interval of waiting, then again the swaying of the curtain, and then a tall, white figure slowly emerged into the dim light. The face was concealed, but Annette saw a hand extended and heard the words:

"My daughter, come to me."

She rose and went forward without hesitation. A hand that was like her father's took one of hers, while the other was laid on her head, just as her father's had been in his last farewell. Then she was gently released and she tottered back and sank into her chair.

The figure retreated as slowly as it had appeared, with the countenance still hidden. Then, as it passed out of sight, it seemed to turn, and through an opening in the folds of the curtain Annette distinctly saw a face—her father's face—she could not be mistaken.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN INTRUDER AT THE SÉANCE.

"And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?"—Isa. viii, 19.

THERE was little sleep for Annette Bell on the night of the incidents related in our last chapter, and she rose nervous and pale on the following morning. She had no appetite, and when she heard Lucy announce that the store-room padlock was not to be found, and that some one had carried off two canvassed hams and a jar of preserved pears, she listened in guilty silence.

She could not doubt that she had received a revelation, but was she any happier than before?

Charlie and Burton sent a letter stating that they could not return for a few days longer, and the younger children were disappointed and found the days that followed very dull indeed; for Fidelia could not always give her time to them, and the older sister who had formerly exerted herself for their comfort, now sat silent and absorbed, seldom speaking unless addressed.

Fidelia's keen eye saw that there was something

more upon her mind than her father's death, heavy as that burden was. And now the perplexed girl began to hear voices in the night. At first she could distinguish no words, and then she knew that a voice said:

"My daughter, if you love me still and trust me entirely, give me back the gifts which I have bestowed on you, and receive something better and far more valuable in return, in token that your confidence is not misplaced."

These words were spoken three times and made a deep impression on their hearer. This message, following what she had already heard and seen, affected her so much that at last she took her bracelets, watch, and chain to Mrs. Towne and requested her to take them and return them. Miss Towne earnestly refused to accept the trust.

"O, by no means, my dear child. I could not think of taking the responsibility," she exclaimed. "Perhaps you are mistaken. The message may have been only the work of your imagination."

Annette protested that this was impossible. She had heard the words three times distinctly on two different occasions.

"Then wait, my dear," answered Miss Towne. "If it is a true message, you may know. You can test it at our next *séance*, by placing the articles on the table beside the vase. If they are demanded, he will take them away."

Annette was obliged to be content with this arrangement, and the following evening was set for the next meeting. In the meantime Annette carried the key to the window-lock and Miss Towne the door key, for, as the latter said, there must be no risk of any skeptical person entering within the sacred walls, or the spirits might refuse to materialize, again.

The time seemed to drag slowly until the evening came for the new manifestation.

Fidelia was informed that Miss Towne and some friends were again coming to spend the evening.

"I am afraid that Miss Towne and her friends are doing you no good, my poor child," said Fidelia, in her motherly way.

Annette answered a little impatiently:

"Well, perhaps this is the last time. I will not trouble you with the children to-morrow night."

"I am not troubled with the children; it is you about whom I am troubled," answered the faithful friend.

Then Annette broke down and cried heartily, and clung to the one who was, indeed, the truest earthly friend near her.

"I wish I could tell you every thing, Fidelia, but I can't now; please wait a little while," she begged.

"Those who are gone were not afraid to trust me," was answered.

"Neither am I afraid to trust you," answered An-

nette; "but I can't tell you now. Please have patience with me for a little while."

So Fidelia proposed making molasses candy, and Annette knew that the children would give her no trouble for that evening. She had told Fidelia that she could not tell her now, but O, how earnestly she longed to confide in some one and ask for advice. There was one feature of the revelation which had proved so unsatisfactory. The figure which she had seen was tall, like the form of her father; the face was his, she knew; the gestures and the language were his own, but the voice was as unlike his as possible.

Could it be that she was laboring under some delusion? But, then, Miss Towne semed so honest, so earnest and sincere! And then, how could she herself be so deceived? She would have an opportunity of seeing and hearing again to-night, and she certainly would not be misled a second time if what she had seen and heard was all the work of imagination.

She would not wear the bracelets and the watch and chain; Miss Towne had told her always to consult her father's known wishes. That surely was good advice, and she would try to follow it; but she would take them with her and place them on the table, as Miss Towne had suggested. If the words she had heard had come from her father, then he would remove them and leave, instead, the more valuable gift which had been promised. If not, no possible harm

could come to them with the shutters securely locked and the key in her own possession.

Thus Annette argued to herself, and yet she was not wholly satisfied.

The darkness deepened and the rain began to fall. Perhaps they might not come to-night. One moment she hoped that they would not, and the next she feverishly longed to hear their coming. Suddenly she heard the click of the gate-latch and she could not have told whether she was glad or sorry. Footsteps sounded on the paved walk, and then the door-bell rang. She knew it was not Miss Towne and her friends, for they would have gone quietly to the room where the meeting was to be held.

Annette hurried out to answer the bell with a half-conscious feeling as one escaping from close pursuit. As she approached the door she saw a man's figure, and when she stepped into the hall she recognized the well known face of Arthur Clark. The sight of his face did her good like a medicine. She knew, from his quiet, tender greeting, that he knew of her great loss, yet his manner was hearty and cheerful.

Arthur had always been a great favorite with the Bell family, and Augusta used to say that he cared more for them than he did for her. He brought messages from Charlie and Burton, having left Plainville after they arrived. Knowing their trouble and loneliness, he had stopped over one train on his way to a distant city, and the sight of his kind, familiar face,

together with tidings and loving messages from old friends, gave Annette such comfort as she had not thought it possible for her to feel, and yet the tears were gathering, and she could not keep them back.

"I am so glad you have come, we have been so lonely and unhappy," she said.

"Well, we must not give way to loneliness," answered the young man. "As for your father, we may not sorrow for him and mourn his departure. We know that it is well with him; that in the employments and enjoyments of heaven he would not wish to return to earth, and we should cultivate a love that is too disinterested to desire it."

There was that in her friend's manner and words which prompted Annette to confide in him without reserve. He listened attentively to all she had to tell him, and then said, quietly:

"We will talk more by and by, Annette. You need tell no one of my coming yet. I am going up to Mr. Newman's for a little while. I will be with you again presently. Wait here until I return."

He did not return as soon as Annette hoped he would do, but he came back before Miss Towne and her friends arrived. He had offered no remarks in listening to Annette's narrative, although he had given the most earnest attention, and she wondered what he would have to say.

"Mr. Arthur, do you believe in spirits?" she asked, when he was again seated beside her.

"Most certainly I do," was the prompt answer. "and I am going to the *séance* with you to-night. You will deposit your watch and bracelets on the table, as you have been directed. All will be well, I think," he added, assuringly; and then he talked of other matters, telling her many things about her old home that he knew would interest her, talking quietly, yet cheerfully; and the time passed unheeded until Miss Towne tapped at the door to call Annette.

"Come, my dear," she said; and Annette and her friend passed out. Miss Towne looked surprised and not entirely pleased to see the gentleman, but civilly gave him a seat near to the door. Then she drew aside the curtain and displayed the recess containing only the table with its vase of flowers. Annette went forward and placed her watch and bracelets beside the floral offering.

Miss Towne protested a little. "Perhaps it would be better to wait. You may have been mistaken." But Annette said that if she had been mistaken it would make no difference, and went back to her seat, leaving the gifts on the table.

Then the curtain was drawn and the medium requested a friend in the audience to turn down the light, and took her place at one side of the curtain at a little distance, with her arms folded, as usual. Then there was the waiting, and then the curtain swayed gently, as it had done on the previous occasion.

Miss Towne coughed, as though a draught of wind had reached her lungs. Again the curtain trembled, and the medium gave another little cough, and glanced toward the spot with a slight, impatient movement of her head that was scarcely perceptible. The folds of the curtain swayed for a moment and then fell to their places.

Annette was gazing at the spot in a passionate way, when suddenly she started. What had happened? Arthur Clark had turned up the light, and making a few quick, noiseless strides, drew back the curtain and revealed—not a materialized spirit, but a real man of flesh and blood, just in the act of grasping the bracelet and the watch and chain.

The window stood wide open, the shutters were thrown back, and the drawn-out staple was hanging from the padlock. The man made a quick dash for the opening, and succeeded in passing through with his booty; but there followed the sound of voices and struggling from outside, and then Mr. Newman was heard to say:

"We have caught the bird, Arthur."

A moment later an officer of the law entered, and, returning the stolen articles taken from the prisoner, proceeded to arrest his confederate, Miss Towne, on the charge of being an accomplice in the crime of obtaining goods on false pretenses. Miss Towne started back on hearing these words.

The impostor stood transformed into her real char-

acter. She fixed her evil eyes on the face of the young girl whom she had so grossly deceived.

"You little traitor!" she exclaimed, menacingly, almost hissing the words between her teeth, "I would like to punish you for your treachery."

Annette, stunned and bewildered by this strange development, made no answer by word or sign. The other persons present dispersed as quickly as possible, some of them protesting their entire innocence in the matter, and ignorance of the fraud.

An examination of the room disclosed the fact that Mr. Bell's portrait had been taken from the frame and hidden under the table-cover. This, then, was the face which Annette had seen through the folds of the curtain, and this also explained the reason for the veiling of the pictures. All this was very plain now, and it almost seemed to Annette as if she had lent herself to the deceit, so grossly had she permitted herself to be imposed upon. But if she had been selfish and credulous in her grief, had she not been sorely punished?

As the meeting had closed early, the picture was replaced in its frame and the room restored to its former condition, and then Annette went to find Fidelia and the children, and a pleasant evening was spent by all. The padlock was duly returned to the door of the store-room, and an end put to further depredations in that quarter.

At the first opportunity Annette confessed the

whole matter to Fidelia, and told her how near she had come to losing her father's gifts, and having nothing in return except the loss and mortification.

Fidelia was almost speechess with indignation.

"It is well that you escaped them!" she exclaimed, when she could find words; "the heartless tricksters! To think of their playing their game on a family that has just met with affliction. But that is their way, the miserable impostors!"

"But I cannot understand how Miss Towne knew so much about papa and every thing," said Annette.

"I'll venture she drew most of it from yourself, poor dear," answered the wise old woman, patting the girl's shoulder. "Well, child, let it pass. You will know them better next time."

A dainty supper was prepared for the guest, and Lonnie, insisting on drinking his tea with "Cousin Arthur," as he called him, fell asleep over his plate, and was carried off to bed by Fidelia; and then they gathered in the parlor and talked and listened until the clock warned them that it was late and time to go to rest.

So ended Annette Bell's first and last experience with the spiritualists. She had learned that the smoothest tongue is not always an index to the kindest heart, and that a show of candor is sometimes mere pretense; but, above all, she had learned from her own experience and the conversation on the subject, that those who claim to deal with the supernatural are

impostors, and that real investigation readily exposes the frauds by which they make dupes of their fellow-creatures.

With childish timidity little Romie had begged them not to talk about "ghosts" so near bed-time, and so the subject was touched upon lightly; but on the following morning Annette spoke of the apparition which Charlie had seen on the night of leaving Plainville, and said she supposed it was some one."

"Yes, that it was," replied Fidelia, who had never heard the story before. "It was Eph himself. I heard him telling about wrapping himself in a sheet from the bed in order to frighten a burglar, as he supposed it was, whom he heard prowling about the house."

"And the burglar was Charlie," laughed Lucy.

Here, then, was another case explained, and Arthur went on relating and explaining incidents which, at the time, seemed to the actors in them wholly unaccountable, but which were afterward found to be the most commonplace occurrences conceivable. Among others, he told the children of a gentleman who was lodging one night among strangers, and was awakened and startled by a noise as of thunder. Rising hastily, he thought he saw a tall white figure standing not far from his bed.

"Who are you?" he demanded. No answer came, and he advanced a little toward the seeming intruder, who looked fearfully gigantic.

On calling out again and receiving no reply, he seized a chair and hurled it with all his might in the direction of the tall white object. He was not a little startled that no sound came back. It was as if the apparition was indeed immaterial, and the chair had passed into space. A little closer investigation disclosed the fact that such was really the case. The old chimney had fallen down, and that was the noise which had awakened him, while the opening in the wall, admitting the starlight, was the tall white ghost which had so startled him.

My reader, never allow yourself to be deluded by supernatural appearances or by supernatural stories. There is a key to all such mysteries. As for "spirit-mediums," so-called, their fraudulent conduct has been so often exposed that no person belonging to this class of impostors should ever be able to deceive an intelligent person.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"AN INNOCENT GAME OF EUCHRE."

"Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."—Rom. xiv, 13.

THE change in the weather prognosticated by Mr. Jeffreys did not take place as soon as he had predicted, but it came before the needful repairs had been made at the old Rectory, and its advent proved a more serious matter to the boys and girls who lived here than they could have imagined.

"I am glad that the carpenters did not tear off the roof to-day," said Charlie, one evening, as the clouds seemed to be marshaling their forces for a general outpouring.

"Luck in leisure," responded Burton, quoting his favorite saw, as he fastened the shutters of their room. "There is sure to be some more fine weather after awhile."

The hour was late, and the inmates of the old house were soon in a deep sleep. The doors and windows had been carefully secured in view of the threatening storm, and so they slept undisturbed. The rain dashed against the shutters like sleet, and poured down for hours without intermission, but the young people

were sound sleepers, and Fidelia, partially deaf, was "lying on her good ear," as she afterward said, and so for a time all slept on.

For a time, I say; for after awhile there was a general commotion. Fidelia was awakened by a pattering on her forehead, and on opening her eyes saw a light in the children's room. On going to investigate matters she saw an extraordinary spectacle. Romie and Lonnie were in a corner with water-proof cloaks spread over them. Lucy was sitting up in bed with a shawl around her and holding an umbrella over her head, while Annette, wrapped in a blanket, was occupying an arm-chair which she shifted from one spot to another from time to time.

The scene would have been highly amusing but for the extreme discomfort which prevailed. Fidelia proceeded at once to find out whether there was a dry spot in the house, and succeeded in finding one room on the ground floor to which the water had not yet penetrated. She lighted the fire, and then went back to the children.

"You will find a dry place in your papa's room," she announced. Making a large pallet not far from the fire, she carried the two sleepers one by one, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing all comparatively comfortable.

"Now I must go and look after those boys," she said to herself. "They will just lie there and drown, and never know what the matter is."

Taking the lamp she made her way cautiously up the wet staircase and through the dripping rooms and passages.

"Just as I expected," she said, on reaching the sleepers. Charlie was covered head and ears in a well-soaked blanket, while Burton was tucking his head under the wet sheet, vainly trying in his sleep to escape from the water that poured upon him in little trickling streams.

"Charlie, Burton, get up—get up!" exclaimed Fidelia, shaking them both. Charlie started up, but Burton tucked his head ostrich-wise further under the sheet.

"Fidelia, I didn't think you would throw water on a fellow before he had time to get up," grumbled Charlie, in a tone of touching reproach. And then some vigorous drops in his face brought him to a full consciousness of the situation.

"Just light our lamp if you can, and then go and see that the children do not float away, Fidelia," he said. "I'll try and get Burt out of this by and by. He thinks there is luck in leisure, you know," he added, grimly.

The utter discomfort which attended and followed the rain can be better imagined than described. It continued for several days, and dampness prevailed almost every-where. Then there came a few bright days, which were hailed with much satisfaction. The house was thrown open to the drying, cheering beams, and

after a time the rooms were, with the aid of fires, restored to a degree of the comfort which they had formerly known. Still clouds occasionally reared their heads above the horizon, and Fidelia expressed the opinion that they were the scouts of another storm. That storm was not very long in coming. It came one day when Eunice Lothay was visiting Lucy, thereby causing the latter much trouble.

The girls had been so busy with their dolls and a grand two-storied play-house that contained dolls' furniture, that they did not notice the approach of the rain until it was coming down heavily. Now, as my reader has seen, Lucy was a foolishly sensitive girl, and the thought of the leaky roof destroyed all her happiness in a moment.

We should never allow ourselves to be unduly mortified and humiliated about that over which we have no control; and we should study to think of ourselves as little as possible, except in so far as this is necessary in order to guard against wrong-doing, and to cultivate right feeling and conduct. Those who are constantly gauging their standing in the opinions of others doom themselves to much unnecessary discomfort and trouble.

As soon as Lucy saw the rain pouring down, she proposed to her companion that they should move the play-house into another room.

"O no," protested Eunice. "We have just got every thing nicely fixed, and we cannot move with-

out disarranging every thing. I hate moving. Besides, it is only poor people who live in old ruinous tenement houses that move."

Lucy winced a little at this statement, and gave up the point, knowing well that it was of no use to press the matter further; but she rolled her eyes up toward the ceiling every now and then in a way that was very puzzling to her companion. She hoped sincerely that her visitor would take her leave before the water should trickle down into the room, as she had reason to remember its having done on the former occasion. But it did not seem probable that this inhospitable wish should be gratified. Eunice was very much interested in her play and took no notice of the rain.

"Theodora was the most handsomely dressed young lady at the sea-side," she said, mincingly, as she shook out the flounces of her doll's dress. "And she received a great deal of attention. I was quite gratified."

A wiser listener would have wondered from what silly older person the little girl had picked up her foolish, self-complacent remarks. But Lucy scarcely heard them, so intently was she watching for the first signs of that distressing leak. At last, to her consternation, they appeared.

A less conscious child would have unhesitatingly spoken of the matter, and two natural children, unstamped with artificial ideas and opinions, would

have extracted no small amount of enjoyment out of the situation by means of an umbrella and a little healthy imagination. But the foolish hostess was as uncomfortable as though the tiny stream trickling slowly toward the devoted corner along the ceiling, and momently re-enforced drop by drop, had been scalding hot, and about to be followed by a perfect deluge of the same temperature.

O dear! It would soon begin to drop just were Eunice was sitting with Theodora, telling about the latter's "beautiful, elegant sea-side costumes and ball-room dresses," with parrot-like vivacity.

"What if it should drop on Eunice's handsome sash, or "Theodora's lovely pink silk that she wore at the opening hop?"

Lucy, in spite of the dilemma, wondered vaguely whether the hop was the same one-foot-exercise which she and Augusta Clark used to practice down the garden walk to the pear-tree and back again. But there was no time for questions or conjectures. The terrible drops could not long hang suspended as they now seemed to do. Something must be done, and done quickly. Leaving her guest abruptly, Lucy went out into the hall, and presently came back with a big umbrella. She astounded her visitor by saying:

"I will put it up and have it ready for you. It is raining, and you will want to go home before very long."

She sat down and held it over Eunice and Theo-

dora. What a nice tent it would have made, and what fun they could have had under their pavilion! But no, Eunice not unnaturally construed Lucy's words and actions into a very broad hint to take her departure, and forthwith flung herself out of the room, and walked out into the rain with Theodora without so much as saying good-bye, leaving the astounded Lucy sitting under the big umbrella alone.

Annette, who had witnessed the departure from an upper window, came to ask why Lucy had not given her visitor an umbrella. Seeing her sister's tears she forebore to question her about the matter, so Lucy was spared an explanation. She spoke to Fidelia about it, however.

"I don't know what the trouble was," answered that worthy, "but it is my opinion her going is no loss if Lucy is in any danger of taking up with the silly stuff which she has got from her mother, I reckon. That child Eunice is no good. In my day children were children, but now they put on all the airs and talk all the silly nonsense of grown-up folks. To hear that little chit babbling about 'ball dresses and walking costumes and gentleman dolls' is enough to make one sick. And it is even worse than that. Only the other day I heard her talking about 'an infant doll's christening robe.' Why, child, that is blasphemous. To teach or allow children to make a play of the solemn rite of baptism is a sin that somebody will be called to answer for. And children

don't enjoy themselves now nearly as much as we used to do, with our one rag-baby doll, neither," added Fidelia, musingly, as she went back to the kitchen.

But if the good old woman congratulated herself on the absence of the girl whose speech and manner she pronounced "no good," her congratulations were cut short. A few days later she came again, bringing invitations from her mother to a grand party to be given in honor of the return of her brothers from school. Charlie, Burton, Annette, and Lucy were all included in the invitation, and the question of acceptance or non-acceptance was freely discussed at the old Rectory. The boys decided to attend, and Annette advised Lucy to go with them, though she said she did not care to go herself.

"I should not enjoy myself in such a gay crowd," she said, thinking of their recent bereavement.

"But Mrs. Lothay says a 'quiet affair.' It is only Miss Nicey who makes it out a grand party," said Burton.

Annette shook her head.

"Well, quiet or not, *I* am not going," said Lucy, decidedly.

"Why not?" asked her brother Charlie.

"Because I am the most unlucky person that ever lived," answered the little girl. "I am always getting into some kind of a scrape when I am trying as hard as ever I can to do my very best."

"Any thing new?" asked Burt.

"Why, the very last time I was at Mrs. Lothay's I felt as if my sash was untying, and I tried to look round to see, and I stumbled over the footstool and spilled my saucer of strawberries and cream in Miss Osgood's lap, and all over the carpet."

Burton laughed, but Charlie said:

"Poor Lu! you do seem to get into dilemmas somehow, but I wouldn't mind. All people have their ups and downs."

"I am not going," persisted Lucy. "I don't want to go anywhere or see any body—unless I could see Mrs. Clark and Gussie," she added, sadly.

A silence fell on the group. They were thinking of old friends and old times. Charlie was the first to speak again.

"Come now, girls, we must not be morbid or selfish. There are friends to be found every-where, and if we want to have friends we must be friendly," he said.

But the appointed evening came, and only Charlie and Burton availed themselves of the invitation, making such excuses as they were able to Mrs. Lothay, for the absence of their sisters.

The party proved to be rather a large one, and was altogether a new experience to the two boys. They had reason long afterward to remember their introduction into "society."

On the following morning, as the young Bells were

at breakfast, Burton was recounting the enjoyments of the occasion in glowing language.

"It is too bad you missed the party, girls; it was a splendid affair," he said. "There were lots of grown-up people there, and they treated us juveniles as if we were as old as any of them."

"I wish I could have gone," said Romie.

"You!" laughed her brother; "what would you have done there?"

"Why, whatever the rest did," answered the little girl, stoutly. "What did they do?"

"O they promenaded and danced and played euchre," answered Burton, avoiding Annette's eye.

"O, I should have lemonaded if I had been there!" put in Lonnie, mistaking the word which his brother had used. "Why didn't you bring me some?"

"Some what?" Burton asked.

"Some lemonade," answered the little fellow.

"O they didn't have lemonade, they had wine," replied Burton.

"Wine and cards!" exclaimed Annette, laying down her knife and fork; "is it possible?"

"Yes," answered Charlie, speaking for the first time; "I was a good deal surprised at first. But Mrs. Osgood and her daughter were there, and Miss Fulton, and Mr. Leland, and ever so many more good people. Of course there was no drunkenness, nor gambling, and Mrs. Lothay says that, by a rational use of such pleasures in her own home, she guards against

the abuse of them in undesirable places by her boys. She says there is no shadow of harm in a glass of wine or a game of euchre. Eugene beat Mr. Watson, a gentleman from New York, in three games in succession, and both he and Edgar drink as much wine as they please."

"They are real nice fellows, and will be a great addition to Pleasant Hill," said Burton.

"What are you looking so solemn about, Nettie?" asked Charlie.

The sister blushed and hesitated before replying.

"O, Net expects to see us full-fledged gamblers and sots, forthwith," laughed Burton. "Well, I'll confess I didn't quite like the sight of the card-table myself at first," he went on. "I felt as if I had made a mistake and had got into some place where I had no business to be. But Miss Osgood played, and you know she is a church member. She asked me to play and offered to teach me. She said she thought it was foolish to be afraid of an innocent game of euchre. I thought if it was no harm for her, it wouldn't hurt me, so I let her show me, and I had beat her handsomely before we had done," he concluded, laughing.

"What would mamma—what would papa say?" stammered Annette.

"O I don't know," answered Charlie, "as they would either of them object to our doing as others do

at a private party. It isn't like going to a saloon and drinking, or to a gaming establishment and betting on the cards. Besides, I once heard papa say that some of our reformers deserved to be called intemperate themselves because they were so bent on compelling every body to fall into their way of thinking in all respects. He said that they did harm."

Ah, if Mr. Bell had suspected that a single remark made to an old friend in discussing methods of reform would have been treasured up and thus misapplied by one of his sons, he would have been more guarded in his language. Yet, had that son but reflected thoughtfully and striven to recall other utterances of his departed parent, he might have remembered words which would have been to him and his brothers and sisters a voice of earnest warning against the dangerous, flowery, serpent-haunted path thus suddenly opened before their feet.

An innocent game of euchre! A harmless glass of wine! A polite avoidance of the egotism of peculiarity, of setting up our opinion in opposition to the views of the assembled company! An amiable submission to the necessity of being all things to all men! Such are the specious arguments that are strewn thickly along the way that leads from "home pleasures" to the dens of darkness and destruction.

Countless numbers, deceived by such sophistry, have taken the initiative in their own homes or the homes of friends, and have closed their careers in

the drinking and gambling saloons that are ever waiting the completion of such a course of training as fits young men for falling into their snares.

Had the experiment never been tried of saving the young by introducing them to the labyrinths of perdition, or had it succeeded even in a large minority of cases, there would be more excuse for the imminent risk which it entails; but experience has recorded the incontrovertible fact that the indulgence in both games of chance and intoxicating drinks is "as the letting out of water."

Some exceptions do not disprove the rule, and the risk of even one soul being lost in the whirlpool of either sin is a risk too fearfully great to be encountered, and if the fact that certain customs are fashionable in polite society in any community is held as sufficient reason for their introduction, and their non-observance is a breach of good breeding, then those who prefer the society of heaven to that of the world of darkness will wisely eschew "good society" in this probationary state.

CHAPTER XIX.

"SEEING LIFE."

"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men."—Prov. iv, 14.

THE party given by Mrs. Lothay on the return of her sons from school was the beginning of a new era to the young folks at the old Rectory. They were ushered into a world that was to them not less novel than delightful, and the old-time pleasures of home and school appeared flat and tasteless compared with the gayeties of suppers and card parties.

It was some time before Annette would consent to be present at any of these festivities; but Mrs. Lothay at last set very plainly before her the so-called duties which the girl owed to herself and to society, and exacted from her a promise to attend the next party given at her house.

"My dear," she said, "you are now a young lady, and it is your manifest duty to bear your share of the burdens which society imposes. We are all social beings, you know, and all have our duties to perform."

Many of Mrs. Lothay's arguments were very true and reasonable, and so Annette received them, and moreover received with them a considerable amount

of sophistry which was skillfully interlarded with the truth.

"Do you dance, my dear? No? I am surprised. With your figure you would excel in the art. And I assure you it is an art—one of the fine arts. Dancing is one of the most important branches of social culture, and no one can expect to move in good society who is ignorant of it. O you must learn without loss of time. I am just organizing a class to be drilled by an experienced teacher, Professor Lankton, and I shall put your name on the list. I assure you we cannot spare you. Society needs all who are fitted to move in the front ranks. We can all aid in holding back those who are tempted to indulge in objectionable amusements and frequent objectionable places. Besides you owe it to yourself not to make a recluse of yourself at your age. Good-morning. I will let you know punctually about the dancing class."

Mrs. Lothay swept out in her stately way, leaving Annette no time to protest even if she had had the courage to do so. The words and manner of the tall, graceful lady were of that overruling character that calls for a very decided effort if it is to be withstood, and Annette's youth and inexperience were no match for the worldly wisdom of her friend.

It was not without misgivings that she reported the matter to her brothers, and she was, perhaps, a trifle relieved to learn that they had been "swooped down on, too," as Burt laughingly expressed it.

"O well, when we are in Rome we must do as the Romans do," he added; and so this mischievous maxim was substituted for the law which should have ruled the conduct of these young lives: "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." Jer. vi, 16.

The young people of whom I am telling you had been brought up in a different atmosphere from that which they were now learning to breathe, but they heard from time to time that the world was advancing and that the "old ways" were too narrow and antiquated. Ah! our Saviour has told us of the broad way and the narrow way, and has bidden us to choose the latter.

But there were persons professing to be disciples of Christ to be found in the ball-room and at the card-table, and should those who were not Christians condemn their behavior as sinful, or fear to follow where they led?

And yet, in spite of this specious reasoning, this young girl and her brothers could not, at first, lose sight of the revolting association that linked a pack of cards in their minds with the vilest and lowest haunts and characters of which they had ever heard.

The dancing seemed less objectionable, more high-toned in its character, and, to Annette's mind, the argument that to be without this accomplishment was

to be awkward, uncultivated, and unfit for good society, had considerable weight.

Annette Bell was not the first who has entered upon this giddy, fascinating amusement to avoid being eccentric. Once entered upon, there seldom needs any further argument in its favor. The intoxicating motion, the lights, the music, the nameless exhilaration that has frequently enabled delicate young girls, who have been scarcely able to walk, to dance for hours without intermission, furnish their own commentary. And if the wine-cup and the card-table open the way to death, moral, spiritual, and physical, to multitudes, what shall we say of the dance? Physicians claim that the exercise, especially as it is usually practiced, is far from being a healthy one. But, laying aside the question of its physical effects and viewing it from an intellectual and moral stand-point, is it healthful in its influence?

Here opinions differ widely. What possible harm, what conceivable sin, can there be in simply moving in time to music? Music has been almost universally acknowledged as elevating in its influence; why should motions responsive to its melody be harmful?

There is, as we have said, another side to this question. Intellectually, the "accomplishment" cannot boast of much. It is one that is excelled in oftentimes by the most illiterate, the lowest in the social scale, and is even taught, to some extent, to animals. This branch of the subject is quickly disposed of;

but is it wrong? Let us look for higher authority than the conduct of a loose, worldly-minded professor here and there.

"The Christian Advocate" tells us that "All the leading religious societies of the land have pronounced in decided terms against the amusement: several of the Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches have said as strong words against the practice as have been uttered by any follower of John Wesley. The fact is, that there is a felt incongruity between the practice of dancing and the profession of piety. It is a fascinating and absorbing pastime that is inconsistent with serious thought and with the earnest purpose that belongs to a Christian life. Some who were pleading a year ago for the innocent square dances have found them inadequate for their growing tastes, and now enjoy the unseemly contact and unhealthy excitement of the round dances they once condemned. It is far better to leave them all alone and seek such recreations as are healthful to the body and elevating to the mind. The giddy mazes of the dance are not of that character."

Do we require any thing further on this subject? Is not this enough? But the cry of warning comes not alone from the pulpit and the religious press. Among the advocates of mere morality much has been adduced against the familiarity enforced in some dances—attitudes and postures that cannot but be

objectionable to the pure minded. I will only ask the reader to look above inferences, fears of contamination from association with those who often have nothing to recommend them but their "culture" in this one particular, and look at facts. Hear the testimony of one whose wide experience calls for attention.

One occupying the position of Chief of Police of the city of New York has made the startling statement, that of the women of that city who fall from the heights of womanly purity, nine tenths begin their downward career in the round dances. Such a statement needs no comment.

Professor Lankton proved, indeed, a skillful instructor, and his pupils were soon able to practice the "fine art" with considerable proficiency, and the round of parties and balls kept the young people of the select circle in a constant fever over costumes and other important details.

Alas! that young girls should so early enter the arena of dress and learn to vie with each other in the effort to outshine, forgetting the robes of modesty and true womanliness, forgetting "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit!"

Before many of those occasions of dazzling gayety had passed by, Annette Bell, but lately scrupulously careful in her zeal to comply with even the imagined wishes of her departed father, so far disregarded his expressed desire as to wear her bracelets, watch, and

chain to a masquerade ball, although a year was yet to elapse before she should come of age.

You will be pained and surprised to hear this; and in truth, Annette herself would not have believed that she could possibly have done so but a short time before. But the love of admiration, the desire for display, had been aroused within her, had swept away her scruples, or silenced them when they tried to make themselves heard.

As for Charlie and Burton, a few months wrought changes in them which were no less real because not so clearly apparent. Burton rarely spent an evening at home, and seemed fitful in his moods; not good-humoredly careless as he had formerly been, but seldom willing to do any thing he was asked to do, and indifferent to the society of his brothers and sisters. He and Edgar Lothay were almost inseparable, and if Fidelia had feared the influence of little Eunice over Lucy, she had since learned to dread a greater evil.

Charlie, as he had said, preferred Eugene, and there was a degree of intimacy between them which gradually increased. These two were more studious in their tastes than the other boys, and sometimes exchanged books and papers.

Charlie Bell was not long in discovering that Eugene Lothay affected a kind of literature which was new to himself. There were books and periodicals which had never fallen under his notice before.

There were infidel lectures, which abused all Christians and scoffed at all things good and sacred, while claiming to labor for the enfranchisement and enlightenment of the masses.

The son of godly parents, Charlie could not but feel and express some scruples at first in regard to reading such books; but he was answered by Eugene, that it was every man's duty and privilege to read both sides and judge for himself. The result was, the old story of the seductive influence of poisonous literature.

Life at the old Rectory assumed a very different aspect from that which it had once known. The early, regular hours for rising and retiring were broken in upon in a way that Fidelia, the faithful old housekeeper, did not at all approve; and had it not been for her untiring efforts, the younger children would have been sadly neglected.

If Annette was zealously discharging the duties she owed to society, her home duties were proportionately in arrears. She had been metamorphosed from the thoughtful elder sister into the gay young lady, much sought after, graceful and pleasing, but fast losing one of the brightest charms of young ladyhood—unstudied sweetness, unconscious loveliness.

Lucy, with all her whims and sensitiveness to mortifications and all the little unpleasant phases of life, was now more thoughtful of the welfare of her little brother and sister than Annette. But feeling, herself,

the deprivations arising from her sister's devotion to dress and society, and the difference between them growing daily more marked, she grew more and more into herself, and refused to have any intercourse outside of the family which could possibly be avoided Eunice Lothay soon found more congenial associates; and Mollie Hicks, Lucy's nearest neighbor on the other side, tried in vain to cultivate her acquaintance.

So Lucy was left to find her pleasure almost wholly in the companionship of Romie and Lonnie. This state of affairs was not without its advantages; but yet if the older of these two sisters had fallen into one extreme, the younger had no less surely fallen into the other. When callers came to the Rectory Lucy avoided them whenever she was able, and when unavoidably brought into contact with strangers she was more and more restrained and uncomfortable; while Annette had acquired such a feverish fondness for company that she was restless and discontented unless she was visiting or receiving visits.

There is a golden mean between the two extremes taken by these sisters. If undue indulgence in social pleasures has a demoralizing tendency, a selfish abstinence from all association with those around us is dwarfing and narrowing in its effects. If excess dissipates the thoughts and makes one frivolous, undue seclusion causes the ideas to center in one's self, and produces a selfish exclusiveness that is opposed to the life which we were meant to live in this world. An-

nette was conscious of pleasing, and somewhat overconfident and fond of display, while Lucy was sensitive and retiring to an extravagant degree. My reader, if both had thought less of themselves, of their own happiness, of how they were impressing others, and how others were feeling and acting toward them, in the nobler thought of discharging their duty and making others happy, it would have been better for each. None are perfect, and none are free from criticism. We should accept this fact and strive to model our characters and our lives after our one perfect pattern, earnestly seeking to know and correct our faults; but, while avoiding the regarding of ourselves with undue complacency, striving not to scan either ourselves or others with morbid depreciation.

There are streams through whose courses immense quantities of water pass from numerous affluents, yet which are never navigable because of their rapids and the multiplied tributaries which dissipate their waters. They hurry through their beds, dancing and glittering in the sunlight, throwing up bright spray, making music in their cataracts, pouring their waters here and there, and then disappearing. Their career is like that of those lives which are dissipated in aimless gayety and pleasure-seeking.

Let me give you another picture. You have heard of the Great Salt Lake of the West, whose waters form a crust on every thing with which they come in contact, in which no living thing is found, and which

is far more strongly impregnated with salt than the ocean. It has been demonstrated that this lake was once more than three times its present size, and that its waters were fresh. The first fact is shown by the regular terraces formed in the Great Basin by its gradual diminution, while its former freshness is argued from the shells of fresh-water species which have been found there, doubtless remains of the former inhabitants of the now briny lake. So long as it possessed tributaries it received and gave, and was a thing of life. The diminished supply of rain-fall has reduced its volume and cut it off from all outlet, and now it can only go on incrusting its shores with its salt deposit, and continuing to be the lifeless lake.

Let us take heed to it that neither of these pictures is like our lives.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HARVEST.

"Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"—Matt. vii, 16.

LITTLE more than a year had elapsed since Charlie Bell and his brothers and sisters had taken up their abode at Pleasant Hill, but great changes had taken place among them in that brief time. Some of the most important were not noticed by the casual observer; but, notwithstanding this fact, there was a marked difference in the lives of some of the inmates of the old Rectory.

The repairs were about completed, and the condition of the house was now in comfortable contrast with that in which they had found it. The rooms in use were cozy and home-like under Fidelia's diligent administration. But if the old home had changed for the better, what of the boys and girls who lived there?

We will meet them around the well-filled breakfast table. It is an eight-o'clock breakfast, but, despite the lateness of the hour, some of the young faces wear a tired, heavy-eyed expression.

"Burt," Annette is saying, "I wish you would stay away from the ball to-night unless you can conduct yourself a little better than you did last night."

"What was the matter with my conduct last night, I should like to know?" demanded the brother, angrily.

"Why, you talked and laughed so loud as to be heard all over the hall, and you said some very silly things. Every body was laughing at you, and I was nearly mortified to death," answered Annette.

"Poor dear!" said her brother, sneeringly; "you'd better stay at home yourself if you think there is any danger of losing your valuable life. I guess I know how to behave myself in company!" he added, fiercely, the dull red that was growing daily on his young face deepening.

"Not when you are as drunk as you were las night," answered Annette, with exasperating cool ness.

Could it be possible? A little while ago the bare thought of her brother's taking a glass of wine at an evening party was painful to this young girl beyond expression; now she could bring the charge of drunkenness against one of them with no perceptible feeling except anger and annoyance.

Burton Bell ordered his sister to mind her own business and hold her tongue so long as she danced continually with such rakes as Hugh Lowell and Cy Calhoun, at the same time interspersing his remarks with expressions not learned in his father's house.

"For shame, Burt!" said Charlie, speaking for the

first time. "Net is half right about it. You are getting no good spending so much of your time with Ed Lothay and the rest of those fellows down at Werner's."

"Ed is as good as Gene any day," retorted Burt; "and smoking and drinking a little down at Werner's is no worse than reading infidel books and lectures, and all the rest of the vile stuff you boys keep in that high-toned reading-room of yours. Faugh! The thought of some of it makes me sick."

Charlie flushed in turn.

"You don't know what you are talking about," he said. "Every body of intelligence examines both sides of every question, nowadays. The world is advancing, and liberal views are more general. People investigate for themselves; they don't take every thing on trust, as they used to do in the Dark Ages."

"Bosh!" answered Burt, contemptuously. "You have read the stuff until you imagine you are Bob himself. I'd rather have an appetite for cigars and whisky than for such dregs of wickedness as you and your set are burrowing in."

Burt seized his hat and left the room before his brother could make any reply. Alas, alas, for the evil communications of Pleasant Hill! The seed had been sown, and was rapidly bringing forth fruit in its kind. Mr. Ford, the faithful minister who had been sent to Pleasant Hill, had often been troubled by the marked absence of young faces in his congre-

gation, but he little knew the evils against which he had been called to do battle. He would yet learn that the specious arguments of modern infidelity and free-thinking were more familiar to the reading portion of the youth of the community than the simplest forms of religious truth. There were even those who sneered with parrot-like proficiency at the idea of going to Sunday-school or church, and wisely quoted the poor fling, that "the average minister is not capable of entertaining the average audience," and that "ministers of the Gospel oppose the opening of places of public entertainment and amusement on the Sabbath from fear of rivalry—that should such resorts be free to all on that day, the churches would be deserted."

Alas for the blind, who submit to be led by the blind! It is a sufficient commentary on the boasted philanthropy, true liberality, and superior human goodness of the trumpeters of such sentiments that they are so ready and eager to impute the most selfish and narrow motives to those whose lives are known and read as disinterestedly devoted to God and humanity.

There is something very suggestive in some of the arguments used by the unrelenting persecutors of Christ and his followers. Can it be that they have consciously passed the line

> "That crosses every path,
> The hidden boundary between
> God's mercy and his wrath?"

Is it, to follow the imputations of one against God's ministers, that he fears loneliness? Ah, the darkest, direst loneliness is the loneliness of despair.

Had Charlie Bell but investigated a little on the other side, he might have learned that there were hundreds who weekly drank deep, inspiring draughts of intellectual as well as spiritual enjoyment from the ministrations of the pulpit, who would have considered the sparkling froth of his champion's gushing periods insipid when not positively distasteful from the taint of his favorite blasphemies.

Lucy Bell listened to the table-talk of her brothers and sister, and thought complacently that she was doing better than they. She was in truth troubled about the courses that they were following, but her trouble was mixed with not a little Pharisaical pride that she was not like them. She now took the younger children to Sunday-school and went to church regularly, even when Annette was too badly "fagged out" by a round of gayety to go to the house of God. Lucy enjoyed the singing and the freedom from the conventionality attendant upon "going into society," and really made no sacrifice whatever to walk in the path which she had chosen; but notwithstanding this she entertained vainglorious thoughts of herself, and mentally made many self-conceited comparisons between herself and the others.

On the afternoon of the day upon which our chapter opens Mr. Ford called at the old Rectory.

Annette was spending the day with a friend, and the duty of entertaining the minister fell upon Lucy. She would much rather have seen him in the pulpit, but managed to respond to his pleasant remarks, and even to venture a few on her own account.

"You were not present at the sociable," he said, as the conversation flagged a little.

"No; I do not care at all for society," answered Lucy, who had come to consider this not caring for society as one of her virtues; "I find my enjoyments at home."

Mr. Ford smiled a little, and she went on.

"My sister Annette and my brothers Charlie and Burton are very gay. I wish you would try to reform them. Burton has fallen into bad company, Charlie reads infidel books, and Annette cares for nothing so much as dancing; and they hardly ever go to church."

There were evidences of real distress as well as unmistakable signs of self-gratulation in the girl's face and manner. Mr. Ford's smile had gone, and in its place had come an expression of deep gravity. He talked long and earnestly with Lucy, setting the right way plainly before her, and when he left her, though he had made no promises to do so, she felt that he would make an effort on behalf of her erring brothers and sister.

But this was not all. Somehow under the minister's kind, wise words Lucy's self-complacency had

vanished like a snow-drift in the sunshine, and a passage which he had repeated kept sounding over and over in her thoughts: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

She felt that there was no danger of her falling into the excesses indulged in by the others, but the faithful pastor had spoken of the sin of self-righteousness, the evil of the unregenerate heart and the necessity of the new birth. He had plainly portrayed the lost condition of those who neglect the great salvation.

One evening, several weeks later, she was sitting down stairs alone after taking the little ones up to their room. She had thought much and seriously since Mr. Ford's visit. His words seemed so like her father's as she sat thus thinking, thinking. Her thoughts went out in memories of the old home and happier times than the present. She felt lonely and dissatisfied. She heard the bell ring for prayer-meeting and wished she might go, as in "the old times," as she called them in her thoughts. Then she wished that some one would come in, if it were only Mollie Hicks. But Mollie had not ventured near the old Rectory for several weeks. The text came to her as if spoken: "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that stricketh closer than a brother." Prov. xviii, 24.

She heard Fidelia singing in the kitchen as she went about her evening work. Then she heard the front

door closed and steps coming along the hall. Could it be that Mollie Hicks and Ida Payne had overlooked her last slight, and were coming in informally to spend the evening? She hoped so; but the steps did not sound just like Mollie's and Ida's, and then she heard them go by the door of her room and pass up the stairs.

"It must be Charlie and Burt," she thought, and she had taken from the post-office a registered letter addressed to Charlie, which had come by the evening mail. She would go and give it to him before he went out again or retired for the night.

Lucy was not a cowardly girl, except in a social way, and she started at once to go up the long staircase, and through the rooms and passages that must be traversed, without a light. She made her way without much difficulty, and as she neared her destination a ray of light streamed from the door which was standing ajar. Then she heard voices. One was Burton's, but she did not recognize the other.

"I tell you, Burt Bell," it was saying angrily, "I won that money fairly, and I must have it, every cent of it," he added, emphatically.

"Mat, do be reasonable," replied Burt. "I tell you I haven't but ten dollars to save myself with, and that really belongs to the butcher instead of me."

Burt's companion uttered an exclamation which I will not repeat, and followed it up with the statement that Charlie had received a registered letter that evening, for he was in the office when his sister

receipted for it; and then he uttered a dark threat that made Lucy shudder and hold her breath to keep herself from crying out. She felt as if she was rooted to the spot as she saw Burt go to his brother's trunk and try the lock with several successive keys which he took from his pocket.

His companion in watching the process now turned toward the door, and Lucy saw an evil-looking face with green glasses over the inflamed eyes which she had noticed in the post-office that evening. At last the lock yielded and the lid was thrown back.

"It isn't here," she heard Burt say, and then she crept into a little anteroom near by and crouched down on the floor in the darkness. She presently heard their voices again, and this time they sounded near the spot, when she trembled, fearing that her breathing would betray her.

"The girl has got it, Burt," she heard the strange voice say. "You can get it from her before Charlie comes in. He has gone to the play and will not be home for hours. I'll wait here."

"Have you lost your senses, Mat Walters?" questioned Burt. "Do you suppose that I am going to commit myself in that kind of way?"

"Well, take your choice," answered Mat, in a hard voice. "If I am to be cheated out of my winnings, I'll have my revenge. When old Newman knows what I can tell him, he'll commit you with a vengeance—to jail, or I'm mistaken." He concluded his

words with a sneering laugh. Lucy heard Burt groan as he stood near the door.

"O come, Burt, you make too serious a matter of a little thing. Go and get the letter; you can tell Charlie that you put it on the hall table, and he'll think a burglar got it; ha, ha!"

The young fellow laughed like a hardened villain of mature years. Lucy clutched the letter more closely in her hand. Then came the sound of Burt's retreating footsteps along the passage, and then the sound of Mat Walters whistling softly with satanic satisfaction over the apparent success of his evil wishes.

I have said that Lucy Bell was not a cowardly girl, but she was now seized with almost uncontrollable terror. She greatly exaggerated the peril of her position, and she would have screamed frantically for Fidelia, but that good woman's growing deafness precluded the possibility of making herself heard at that distance. She might, no doubt, have thus frightened away the young would-be thief. But not so reasoned Lucy. A boy who would gamble and steal might not hesitate to commit murder, she reflected.

She remembered that a door at the other side of the little room where she was crouching communicated with another room which opened out upon the balcony at the back of the house. She might make her escape there. Hurriedly unbuttoning her shoes, she removed them and stole noiselessly across the apartment. She

found the door standing ajar and pushed it open as quietly as possible. It creaked a little on its unused hinges, and Mat Walters ceased his quiet whistling. Lucy darted through and hurried out on the balcony. She thought the youthful swindler was in close pursuit, though in truth he had only been startled a little by the creaking noise, coming from he knew not where.

The girl hid behind a wide pillar and waited, but no sound reached her and she began to feel comparatively safe. She looked up at the stars shining quietly overhead, and drew long breaths of relief. It had been but a few minutes since she had gone up stairs to deliver Charlie's letter, but it seemed like a long while ago. And now that she felt more safe, the thought of Burt began to trouble her sorely. Could it be that he had gone so far in the broad and slippery way as to gamble, and then steal the money that was intended for family expenses, to meet the result of his folly and sin? And what had he done to Mr. Newman?

There was no ingredient of self-righteousness in Lucy's thoughts now, no feeling but sorrow and shame mingled with a terror which made her tremble from head to foot. What course should she pursue? She dared not meet Burt until Charlie's return; and in the mean time how should she keep out of his way? And so far from the occupied portion of the rambling old house, how should she know when Charlie or

Annette should return? What if Fidelia or the children should miss her?

One perplexing question after another hurried through her mind. She felt that she could suffer tortures rather than reveal to any one the terrible discovery which she had made, but she would do that rather than give up the letter. All at once the voices of Burt and his companion in evil reached her ears in loud and angry tones. She must fly. She remembered that the carpenters had left a ladder at the end of the balcony, and she at once resolved to climb down and go to Mrs. Hicks's and therea wait the return of Charlie. True she had left her shoes in the anteroom, but something must be done. So she groped about in the dark until she found the dangerous stair-way, and unhesitatingly began to descend.

She did not even wait to put the letter in her pocket, but still held it in her hand. As she climbed slowly down the ladder, holding carefully as she went, she encountered about mid-way a broken rung and nearly lost her balance. In recovering herself she dropped the letter.

Hurrying down as quickly as possible, she groped about on the frozen snow, her feet and hands aching with cold, and her pulses throbbing painfully. A few minutes later a light flashed from the balcony which she had just left. She knew the boys were searching for her, but she was glad of the shining rays. They showed her the lost letter, in its large yellow envelope,

close beside her. She grasped it, and hurrying around the house made her way to Mrs. Hicks's, by running through the untrodden snow of the wide grounds of the Rectory and climbing the division fence.

Mollie was not a little surprised to see her visitor, but without seeming to notice her shoeless feet, she gave her a warm welcome.

"I am so glad you came," she said. "Here, Lucy, sit right down in mother's big chair and warm yourself. I was feeling so lonely all by myself. Mother was obliged to go over to Mrs. Payne's."

She rattled on, as if Lucy's visit was a very frequent occurrence, and as if she never noticed that her visitor was greatly excited and trembling violently. She talked on and on in a way that called for no replies until Lucy was more at her ease and O, so warm and comfortable!

The two girls told stories which they had read and heard, and exhausted each her stock of riddles and puzzles, and then Mollie brought out a pitcher of milk with two cups and a plate of snowy bread, and they had a little feast together, a love-feast, I think, for Mollie showed a kind, forgiving, and loving spirit, and Lucy was drawn toward her friend in a way that would never permit her to feel cold and indifferent toward her again.

CHAPTER XXI.

TRUTH AND ERROR.

"What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper."—Psa. cxx, 3, 4.

IT was not many days after Mr. Ford's visit to the old Rectory that he called at the place which Burton Bell had sarcastically styled "that high-toned reading-room." It was pleasantly furnished by Eugene Lothay. Its tables were covered with books and papers and its walls hung with pictures. A brief examination of the books having a bearing on religious questions would have shown them to be all on one side. The liberality of sentiment which professed to examine both sides existed only in name. The youthful patrons of the establishment had not, perhaps, noticed the fact, but the literature had been supplied with a view to the examination of one side only, that side which, alas for the depravity of fallen human nature, acknowledges no divine authority, and gives to the will the widest possible license consistent with "the light of reason, that infallible guide," as those who know no better have styled it.

There were several volumes from infidel pens, and many papers and pamphlets containing attacks upon

the authenticity of the Bible, but no copy of the holy Book, no Commentaries, no answers to infidel objectors, no testimony from those who have said, not "My reason leads me to draw certain conclusions," but "*I know that my Redeemer liveth.*"

There were some among the collection of writings that taught or professed to teach a high morality. There were others which spoke ostentatiously of purity while advocating evil.

There were but two of the youthful investigators present on the evening of Mr. Ford's visit, Charlie Bell and another bearing marks of dissipation plainly stamped on his face. He, too, had been a child of prayers, and he, too, was seeking for justification in the course which he wished to follow.

The minister accosted the young men pleasantly and entered into conversation with them. It did not require much time or trouble to elicit the fact that those who were accustomed to frequent the place were drinking error like water.

Mr. Ford wisely forebore to attack their false position until he had shown the boys its unfairness. He examined the authors, some of them standard infidel works, and others, the frothy lectures which have drawn such crowds by their very frothiness. After continuing the examination for some time the visitor quietly asked:

"And where are your authorities on the other side of the question?"

The boys looked a little surprised and somewhat confused. The minister continued:

"I do not see Dr. Clarke's Commentaries, nor Scott's Family Bible, nor Barnes' Notes. I see none of the multitudinous answers to infidel works; none of the defenses of Christianity."

"We have all read the Bible," Charlie managed to say, at length.

"But have you studied it carefully?" asked Mr. Ford. "This author," he continued, taking up a modern infidel lecture which Charlie had been reading, "assumes that the Bible is uninspired and full of mistakes, and that those who claim to be guided by its precepts are hypocrites. He is unable to concede one grain of truth or sincerity to those who call themselves Christians. Now do you think that this is quite a fair or manly position to assume?"

Charlie answered that he supposed not.

"Judging him by his own standard, it might be asked by those on the other side: How much of sincerity is there in the boasted tranquillity of that one who goes through life in open denial of his Maker? How much of honest philanthropy in the soul that, falling below the plane of the wretched Dives, strives, with untiring zeal, to bring others into a possible 'place of torment?' Might it not happen that among generations of 'pretenders' in the religious world, there should be pretenders among those who acknowledge no obligation to their Creator?"

The boys admitted that they did not think it impossible.

"Ah, my young friends," the visitor went on, earnestly, "such spiteful flings as that man indulges in can have no weight except with those who are ignorant or willingly deceived. Do not allow yourselves to be misled by such a one. Do not accept unhesitatingly the bare statements of one who, as wiser persons can certify, has repeatedly displayed, in their darkest forms, both ignorance and unfairness. There is abundant argument and irrefutable proof, if you will take the trouble to look for it. But let me ask you," he continued, pleasantly, "if either of you has ever known a man to be changed from a drunkard, a thief, a quarrelsome, lawless man, or any such evil character, to one entirely different, by being brought under the influence of the Bible and the Christian religion?"

Charlie Bell and his companion, after a little hesitation, confessed that they had known of such instances more than once.

"Well, my friends, have you ever seen or known of similar effects having been produced by the imbibing of infidel views? It must be something more than mere opinion or intellectual belief that makes this wide difference. And the overwhelming arguments to be drawn from the lives of multitudes who have testified to their honest belief in the religion of Jesus Christ has been rendered tenfold more con-

vincing by testimony in what has been called 'the honest hour,' the hour of death. You may have read statements that religious ecstasies are not confined to the so-called disciples of Jesus, that they are the effect of delirium and a part of the phenomena of death; that the wicked see angels as well as the good. But we have abundant, incontrovertible testimony that the 'death-bed fancies' of the two classes are, in a large majority of cases, as widely different as light and darkness, and this rule is by no means disposed of by a few apparently exceptional cases. The wicked have been known to die with fortitude, they have passed into the unknown world giving no sign of fear, but such cases are by no means general, and who ever heard of one who in buoyant health could turn away from life not only with tranquillity but gladness?"

Charlie Bell's mind reverted to his mother. She had died from some affection of the heart, and had been subject to violent attacks that were like death, but from which she had several times rallied and seemed for a considerable interval in her usual health. Her physician told her that the end would come suddenly, and was liable to come at any moment. But this information had brought no fear or distress. She had talked of her approaching departure with calmness and even cheerfulness, comforting her friends with the reminder that the separation would be short. She knew in whom she had be-

lieved and went about her daily duties quietly, but not afraid.

Was it strange that all these facts came back to her erring son at this moment? Was it not more strange that he should ever have lost sight of them? He seemed to see before him the dear patient face that always wore a smile which even death did not remove. Then he thought of his father's teachings, of his strongly-expressed belief in the reality of divine things, of the pure, unselfish life that had but lately "gone out" in that distant land. Could it be, he asked himself, that it had, indeed, gone out as a candle?

Mr. Ford was silent for a little while, and the thoughts of at least one of his hearers were busy. Several others had now come in, and though at first there were sly winks and whispers of "a sermon," most of the young men listened to what was said, and let us hope that some good seed found a lodgment in the minds of all.

No one offered a reply, and he went on: "If the state of the soul at the approach of death is only the result of previously adopted views, the reflection, as in dreams, of the habitual trains of thought, then why do so many who have lived without God, and in complete indifference or open opposition to holy things, acknowledge the mistake which they have made when they come to look beyond this world? Multitudes have died for the name of Christ, some of

them new converts, and have gone to meet death, firm in their belief, and not only fearless but joyful. Joy unspeakable is the characteristic which has distinguished the martyrs of Jesus from the devotees of other systems of religion, or those who deny all religious belief. The patriot has been known to die content because victory crowned the flag under which he had fallen; the philosopher has sometimes died calmly, upheld by the system which he has believed and taught; but what class of persons, except Christians, have such a record for meeting the monster with joyfulness? Those who have gone to the stake with songs, were certainly not then in the delirium of death."

The faces gathered in that reading-room of infidel literature all wore a thoughtful expression as the earnestness of the visitor became more apparent, while he went on to say:

"My young friends, the unprejudiced mind must inquire with honesty and sincerity, 'Are these things so?' Was Jesus divine? Are the professed followers of the God-man ignorant fanatics or pretenders and deceivers of the people? Are they teachers of lies, or are they honest followers of him who suffered like accusations and foretold them for his disciples? Are the revilers of Christ and his servants to-day, like the malicious Jews of old, fulfilling his prophecies to their own condemnation?

"You say you wish to know both sides of the

question and judge for yourselves? Let me ask you, in all kindness, what investigations you have made on the side of safety? Should the opinions of infidel teachers be true, it will not matter hereafter whether or not you indorsed them; but you will do well to know soon whether it is true that the Bible points the way to heaven and happiness, and warns against that place where 'the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.' If there is the bare possibility of an eternity of happiness or woe, is it not the part of wisdom to take the safer course? There is no risk in accepting the Bible. Its teaching will fit you for a higher, nobler life. Its code of morals has been pronounced, even by unbelievers, the purest ever offered to man. Its pages bear no falsehoods dressed in the garb of truth. Young men, I beg of you to beware. The so-called candor that is so willing to examine the arguments of the enemies of truth, is not infrequently the innate appetite for error which lurks in the unregenerate heart. And the reading of such books and lectures by the young is the more dangerous, because they are not competent to discern the truth or falsity of what they read. An avowed infidel once confessed to humiliation and a rising doubt of the ground on which he was standing, on finding that some of the most prominent and learned men on his side of the question gave currency to grave and deliberate falsehoods in order to establish the appearance of the truth of their state-

ments. Being a learned man in this world's knowledge, the untruths were palpably plain to him, but doubtless they were accepted as irrefutable arguments against the truth of God's word. I repeat, it is better to err on the side of safety. I have not given you the evidences of the truth. The books of the world could not contain them all. But the strongest, surest evidence is that which, if we will, we may have written on our own hearts by the finger of God. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.'"

After Mr. Ford had left the room there was silence for some time. The young men stole questioning glances at one another, but no one spoke for several minutes.

At this juncture Eugene Lothay came in.

"Well, fellows," he began, "you had a visit from the parson, did you? Did you fight him with Tom Paine, Volney, or Ingersoll? I'd give a champagne supper to have been here; ha, ha! I say, boys, why don't some of you speak. I want the particulars of the battle."

"There wasn't any battle, Gene," answered Robin Price, a little impatiently. "Mr. Ford was just talking plain common sense, as I take it, and we boys were listening with what grace we could summon. I say, Gene," he continued, "I guess the Seven Sages of Greece were a trifle ahead of us fellows, after all."

"What do you mean?" asked Eugene. "Have you got religion under Parson Ford's preaching?"

"Not I," answered Robin, flushing a little. "To get religion is one thing, and to get an inkling of the fact that I am one of a club of ignorant, self-conceited young reprobates is quite another. I am going back to the Bible and first principles, for my part."

Eugene Lothay laughed loud and long. He was joined rather faintly by one or two of the others.

"Have your laugh," said Robin, coolly; "it makes no difference to me. I saw my mother die as Mr. Ford says only Christians can die, and I know what her life was; the more shame to me to be found hunting for flaws in the Book by which she lived and died."

The boys were silenced, but Eugene tried to smile scornfully.

"I tell you, fellows," went on Robin, "I am not trying to show any superior wisdom or goodness, for I haven't any; but I must take the truth as it comes to me."

"Right!" spoke Charlie Bell, not without an effort, and feeling keenly the superior courage of the boy who had given words to the thoughts which were struggling for speech in his own mind. Ah! the time was not far distant when the truth would impress him even more forcibly and distinctly than it had done to-day.

My reader, I would impress upon your mind the importance of an experimental knowledge of those truths which are challenged by unbelievers. It does not require a life-time of study; it does not require a careful comparison of all the arguments adduced to establish in the mind a certainty of the truth of revealed religion. The man who was born blind needed no arguments to prove to him that Jesus was divine. All that he knew, or needed to know, was: "Whereas I was blind, now I see."

CHAPTER XXII.

DOUBLE TROUBLE.

"Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night."—Psa. xc, 3, 4.

WHEN Lucy Bell reached home late on the night of her adventure, she found Charlie alone in the sitting-room. Burton had gone out again, and Annette had not yet returned.

Lucy was so much relieved that she hurried into the room and delivered the letter without thinking of her plight, and then, suddenly remembering it, became terrified lest Charlie should notice it and begin to question her. The brother, however, appeared preoccupied, and did not seem to see that Lucy wore no shoes; but having noticed that she had just come in, he asked:

"Why, Lucy, have you just come from the post-office?"

"N—no!" she stammered, "I—I have been spending the evening with Mollie Hicks."

"You should not have carried the letter about with you," he said. "You ought to know better. You might have lost it."

Lucy took the rebuke far more meekly than she was wont to do.

"Why, where are your shoes, Lucy?" he asked, abruptly, as his sister's efforts to conceal her feet drew attention to them.

"They are up in the—they are up stairs," answered Lucy, in much confusion.

"And you have been out in the snow without them? Child, are you crazy to expose yourself in this way after having sore throat nearly all winter?"

He wondered for a moment if she had not really lost her mind, remembering Lucy's sensitiveness both to cold and to appearing in a role in the least ridiculous.

The girl had made up her mind to keep her late discoveries entirely to herself. She was horrified at the knowledge which she had gained, and longed to unburden her mind by sharing it with some one, but she feared the consequences. She trembled at the thought that the culprits knew she had overheard their conversation; but she hoped against hope that they might not have seen the shoes left in the anteroom, or might have supposed that they were left there at some other time, and have only been alarmed at the noise of the creaking door. She was sure that when they came out on the balcony they were searching for a possible listener, and she felt that her secret was a dangerous one. What should she do? She stood hesitating for a moment before replying. The

next she heard Burton come in. She listened to the creak of his boots as he went up stairs.

"O, Charlie! don't ask me to explain," she gasped. "I have done nothing wrong. I was obliged to go to Mrs. Hicks's. I was obliged to go without my shoes. I had to go to take the letter to keep it safe. Don't ask me any questions, but take care of the money, and don't put it in your trunk nor say anything about this to any body!"

Lucy hurried her sentences one after another almost without breathing. Charlie was silent for a moment and looked at his sister curiously. Then he said, in a re-assuring way:

"All right, Lu; you're a girl among a hundred. Now go and get your feet dry and warm before you go to bed."

As Lucy said good-night and went out, she wondered if Charlie were humoring her whim, as he thought, because he considered her crazy, or whether he had an idea of the terrible truth.

On reaching her room she tried to dry and warm her feet, as she had been directed; but the fire had burned low, and the longer she sat by its few dull embers, the colder she seemed to become. She was shaking as if in a fit of ague. At last she undressed hurriedly and crept shivering into bed.

The younger children were sleeping peacefully, their regular breathing sounding plainly in the quiet chamber; but Lucy turned from side to side and lived

over and over again and again the experience of the past evening. Then a horror of darkness came over her and she seemed to be wrapped in a terrible nightmare. A little later—was she dreaming or did Burton really enter the room with a light and stand by her bedside with menacing eyes, and whisper, threateningly:

"If you ever dare to tell I'll kill you!"

It all seemed very real. She seemed to hear the creaking of his boots grow fainter and fainter, and then die away in the distance as he went down the stairs. Then she imagined herself in the anteroom alone in the darkness, listening to the dreadful words again, and wildly groping about for a way of escape; then an agony of thirst possessed her and she clutched for the snow that seemed to be all around her and yet eluded her grasp.

It was past midnight when the door opened and a figure entered enveloped in an opera cloak. A lamp was placed on the table, the cloak was thrown off, and Annette Bell, in evening toilet, stood, with bright eyes and glowing cheeks, looking at her reflection in the mirror. The dress was of some filmy white material, falling low upon the shoulders, where it seemed to hang suspended by narrow bands of lace—such a costume as no woman can wear without doing violence to her womanly modesty. The face which looked at her out of the glass was indeed a lovely one. She must have known that without the aid of

flattering tongues, and been glad of it, for beauty is one of God's good gifts and not to be despised or underestimated. But with different surroundings this young girl might have learned that there is a higher form of loveliness than that which is outward and perishable—the immortal beauty of the soul, the fadeless bloom of life and character. She might have had a higher aim than to be the bright, particular object of admiration and envy, thirsting for compliments, and grudging to all others what seemed as the breath of life to her.

As she turned her head sidewise to mark the effect of the sparkling jewels in her ear, what was it brought to her mind so forcibly a long-forgotten remark of her father's:

"Perforating the ears, and hanging jewels in the holes, is a relic of barbarism; and that a woman of culture and refinement should submit to a fashion which is the very essence of savage adornment, is to me utterly preposterous. A mutilation of the human form divine for the purpose of suspending thereto a trinket! As well pierce the nose also, and place a jewel there."

Annette's face took on a shade of sadness as she thus recalled her father's sentiments, for she had not become utterly hardened, this girl whom false friends had led so far into the mazes of fashion and folly. Might not that father's memory prove the clew which should yet guide her feet out of the labyrinths and

into the safe and pleasant paths of wisdom and consecration to the Master's service?

A faint inarticulate sound from one of the beds reached her as she turned away from the mirror with a little sigh, and a long, lingering look at her reflected image.

Lucy was sitting up in bed, gazing at her sister with wild, bright eyes.

"Are you an angel?" she asked, in an awe-struck tone.

Annette started. Silly, sentimental young men had more than once compared her to an angel, and the flattery had been sweet to her vanity; but now a guilty thrill shot through her at the words from Lucy, spoken in a tone so unlike her own.

"What is the matter, Lucy?" she asked, walking close up to the bed and laying her hand on her sister's arm. In that moment there came to her, with painful clearness, the consciousness of the great distance that had grown and imperceptibly widened between herself and Lucy since she had entered upon the gay round of fashionable life. How much of her time was spent away from home, and how much of the little that remained was devoted to her own selfish considerations—ball dresses, masquerade costumes, and kindred interests!

Lucy looked up into her face wonderingly, and said nothing. Annette repeated her question with a kind of nameless dread. But Lucy now began to

grope nervously with her hands, as if in search of something.

"The letter! the letter!" she said; "I am sure I put it in my pocket safe. O, I have lost it, and he will be sure to find it with his horrid green spectacles!"

A moment later Annette was hurrying down stairs as fast as her white-slippered feet would go. She roused up Fidelia, and then flew up stairs again to dispatch one of her brothers for the doctor. She found their room empty, although it was now nearly one o'clock. She must go for the doctor herself, she thought, and she made haste back to her room. Fidelia was trying, with little success, to quiet the raving girl, who was plainly in the delirium of fever.

It has been said that trials never come singly, and it often seems to us as though the axiom is verified in our own experiences; and so it seemed to Annette Bell. She was crossing the room to get a wrap before going after Dr. Dalton, when she heard a sound of feet coming up the staircase with a slow, measured tread that made her think of pall-bearers. She stood waiting in the middle of the room. Then a voice, that of Dr. Dalton himself, said:

"Take him right into the first room. We can go no farther."

Annette did not scream nor faint, but she felt as if turned into stone, as Charlie, with two others, carried some one in and laid him on the sofa.

"What is the matter?" asked Fidelia. "O, Burton,

my poor boy!" as she caught sight of the pale face, with blood trickling down the forehead.

Annette went to the sofa, and, dropping down on a chair without a word, gazed at her brother's white face. "A bullet—a row at Werner's!" explained the doctor to Fidelia. "It is uncertain who the perpetrator is." He spoke in a low tone, turning away from where the sister sat; but she had heard it all.

Dr. Dalton looked about in a troubled way. Lucy was moaning for the cool, white snow, and clutching at the counterpane, and then conveying her burning hands to her hot lips in a futile attempt to quench her thirst.

"What have we here—fever?" muttered the doctor. "She must be taken to another apartment. I want the room empty. I will come to her presently. You, miss," addressing Annette, "either go to bed at once, or put on some clothes. Such weather as this is not a fit time to be going about half-dressed."

Annette, confused and startled by the old gentleman's words, rose to her feet and started to go out, clutching, in a spasmodic way, at her meager corsage, uncertain, in the fright and confusion of the moment, as to what was the real state of her toilet. She stole a glance at the mirror as she passed, and a hot wave of color swept over her face. She had told herself, and had been told by others, that her costume was beautiful and becoming to her. It had seemed to be so in the glitter of the ball-room; but here in the

chamber of sickness, perhaps death, and under the grave, dark eyes of the physician, it seemed unfit for any woman to wear, unless, indeed, it was some of those lost ones whose names she would shrink from speaking.

The night crept on and morning dawned; its cold gray light creeping gloomily into the two chambers of the old Rectory, where anxious faces watched over the two sufferers, the one lying white and motionless, the other tossing restlessly and talking wildly of some terrible thing which seemed to press upon her brain with a weight of agony.

The days came and went, and the messenger which must come alike to all, soon or later, seemed about to summon one or both of these young souls into the presence of the Judge of all the earth.

Annette had heard from Charlie the story of Lucy's exposure on the night on which she was taken ill, and her self-accusing thoughts were hard to bear. She had once felt that a deep responsibility rested upon her as the eldest sister in this doubly-orphaned family; but how had she discharged her duty? There had been many days when she had scarcely seen her brothers and sisters, except at meals, and she rarely spent an evening at home, except in the parlor with visitors. Her home duties and pleasures had been swallowed up by other aims in the new life upon which she had entered. Her dead parents had both confided the younger members of the family to her especial care

and she had betrayed her trust. While following the path of gayety into which she had been allured, and intoxicated by the so-called pleasures of society, the monitor had spoken more and more feebly, and thoughts of higher duties had been easily thrust aside. She had neglected her earthly friends, and, forgetting her Bible and her prayers, she had also turned away from her Father in heaven.

But now the voice of an accusing conscience was ever speaking to her soul, and refusing to be silenced. Had she but striven to do her duty, all this might not have come upon her. Had she tried to make home what it once was to her brothers, Burton might not have turned to a drinking and gambling saloon for entertainment. Had she earnestly sought, day by day, for the blessing of God upon the household, they might have realized a promise which her mother had loved: "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." Psa. xci, 4.

Alas! did her father and mother know what had happened on that dreadful night? and did they know that she was whirling in the dizzying waltz while the terrible tragedy was being acted?

My reader, there are apt to be abrupt and startling changes in the lives of all. This is not our abiding-place, and there is nothing permanent in our life on earth. To-day the smooth-flowing stream of our existence seems to promise that "to-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundant;" but, lo! if our soul is

not required of us in the night-time, the morrow brings a change that is like the plunging of the stream from the precipice which it has reached, in the boiling, roaring cataract. We look back upon life as it was on yesterday, and almost doubt our own identity. Happy, indeed, are we, if self-questioning adds not to our pain. Happy, indeed, are we, if remorse makes no part of our misery. Happy are we, if in the midst of the startling changes of earthly things our hearts are fixed, resting on the sure, immovable foundations of the Rock that is higher than we.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WHERE AM I GOING?"

"The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death."—Prov. xiv, 32.

IT was a wild wintry night. The wind was shrieking around the corners of the great old house and moaning through the trees like the voice of some creature in the last extremity of pain.

The wounded boy and the sick girl were moaning also in their delirium, and tossing their arms, and, although separated by several rooms, were talking as if to each other, their language almost the same.

The doctor in his evening visit could not fail to notice this, as the members of the household had already done before.

"I tell you I cannot find the letter, and I have no money," Burton was saying over and over, and then, in a threatening tone: "Don't you dare to tell, or I will kill you!"

The doctor administered a quieting draught to Burton, and then went to see his other patient. She seemed to be a little more quiet, but when the physician laid his fingers on her wrist, she started and exclaimed:

"O, what shall I do? They will find me and take

the letter. It has fallen into the snow and I cannot find it, and my hands and feet are so cold. They are coming to kill me. Please don't tell on me, Charlie." And then, clutching wildly at the doctor's hand, "Catch me, the ladder is falling!"

If the ravings of these two suggested a problem to all who heard them, its solution was plain to Charlie. The next morning he went out on the balcony, at the rear of the wing in which his room was situated, and saw where Lucy had made her escape by way of the ladder. He saw where she had groped about in the snow for the lost letter. If he had been puzzled over the matter before, it was all clear to him now, and he, too, blamed himself severely, as Annette had done, for the terrible wanderings of his brother from the path of right. His father's parting words, "Charlie, my boy, try to fill my place as well as you can," came to his memory as if spoken in his ears.

It was true that Burton had been headstrong and intolerant of restraint, but in how far was he to blame for his own example? They had both been trained to a reverence of the word of God, to an observance of the Sabbath and the worship of the sanctuary. How far was he responsible for his brother's misdeeds in that he himself had espoused the "liberalism" which denies the authority, the reality, of divine things?

He had ranked himself with those who question the truth of the Bible. He had forsaken the assembly

of the Lord's house. He had sought his own pleasure on the holy day, and though he had not gone to the excess of dissipation which had marked his brother's swift downward course, he felt that he was indeed the guiltier of the two. Since he had questioned the divine authority of the word condemning drunkenness and dishonesty, what wonder that his younger brother should indulge himself in these sins?

Charlie reflected that there must have been an effort to take the letter away from Lucy, thus compelling her to fly from the house, and asked himself: "Who was Burton's companion in crime?" Was it not probable that, whoever he was, he was also the unknown perpetrator of the attempt on Burton's life? On committing the deed he was supposed to have made his escape by a side door.

The proprietor of the den of destruction testified that on hearing the shot he entered the room to find the victim alone, and subsequent investigation had elicited no further information. If Werner had any knowledge in regard to the matter, he perjured himself by declaring his entire ignorance. Some suspicion rested upon him, but was soon removed in the minds of most. There were others who, remembering his occupation, shook their heads doubtfully over his discharge.

What wonder that men should be quick to suspect the proprietor of a drinking and gambling saloon? And yet we sometimes hear such institutions and their

heads styled "respectable!" A respectable place for luring men to darkness and destruction, both of soul and body! Could any thing be more contradictory?

In the days and nights that followed, Charlie Bell thought much of the principles which he now saw he had simply rejected in the ignorant pride of a so-called investigation, which had been merely an eager reading of a few shallow tirades against the truth.

He had not failed to discover this fact while listening to Mr. Ford's earnest words, not many days before; and on that very night, that terrible night which he could not remember without a shudder, he had seriously thought of proposing to his brothers and sisters that they should all go to the prayer-meeting. I say, he seriously thought of it; he shrank, however, from the surprised laughter with which he felt that Burton and Annette would receive the proposal.

It was the night of the grandest ball of the season. "Annette would sooner lose her soul than miss it," he said to himself; and as for Burt, the idea of taking him to church was out of the question; so, as he himself had a ticket for the play, he thought he might as well get the benefit of it.

Such are the arguments which Satan is ever ready to suggest to those who stop to parley when the plain path of duty is before them.

The play had proved to be one of those celebrated moral plays with the morality scrupulously left out,

as doubting theater-goers generally find to be the case.

Charlie Bell, boy though he was, was thoroughly disgusted at sight of some of the costumes worn upon the stage, costumes not unlike that in which his sister was at that time moving in the brilliant light of the ball-room. There was a little more of tinsel and glitter on the dresses of the actresses, perhaps, but that was about the only difference.

How far away it seemed now, that never-to-be-forgotten night. O, the "quiet hours" had been so rare for these young people; and now that they grew into days and weeks, their thoughts were busy with the past, and retrospect was burdened with self-questioning and remorse. The future, with its painful uncertainty, they shrank from contemplating.

Neighbors and friends kindly offered their assistance in caring for the sick ones, but there was little rest or relaxation for the members of the household.

Annette's gay friends called occasionally to express their sympathy, and tell Annette how sorely they missed her from "society," giving her, however, every now and then, sundry bits of gossip strongly flavored with self-complacent rivalry and exultation over conquests which she had not shared. They gradually fell off one by one, and the young girl, thus brought face to face with the stern realities of existence, recalled, with a little throb of pain, the poet's skeptical query: "What is frendship but a name?"

Annette would yet learn that it is infinitely more than this; that what she had called friendship was as unlike the genuine article as is the spurious, corroding coin to the fine gold that cannot be dimmed.

One fall of snow succeeded another until the drifts were piled high around the unused windows and doors of the old Rectory, and the half-famished birds flocked about the house to find food. The little ones delighted to feed them, and keenly enjoyed the big snow, with all its accompaniments.

The doctor's daily visits in his sleigh, the shoveling of paths every morning, the great, white, unbroken surface of the fields, were all to their young untroubled spirits things of beauty and joy. But to the older brother and sister the effect was depressing. The vast expanse of the chilling whiteness on the earth and the heavy dark clouds overhead seemed a part of the great grief and gloom which had come into their lives.

There seemed no ray of light from above, and the possibility of a grave—perhaps two—to be made under the shroud of snow, which now seemed to them typical of death itself, made them sick at heart.

But, gloomy as the prospect seemed to be, at last there came a day when Lucy was pronounced much better. Dr. Dalton intimated that the recovery was a question of careful, patient nursing. This she was likely to receive, for both Fidelia and Annette seemed

indefatigable. and Charlie had developed unlooked-for talent in that sick-room.

But if Lucy seemed to have safely passed the crisis in which her life seemed hanging by a thread, not so with Burton. The doctor's face was very grave, as he came and went day after day. Then others were summoned to a consultation. They indorsed the treatment of the attending physician. All was being done that could be done, but would it prove of any avail?

The brother and sister each asked the question over and over again as they sat by the bedside.

Mr. Ford and his kind little wife were their most devoted friends in this time of trouble, and gave them all the help and comfort that was in their power to give; but a little later the measles appeared among their own children, and the Bells saw less of them in consequence.

One night Fidelia was sleeping in the room with Lucy, who was slowly but steadily convalescing, and Annette and Charlie were to watch with Burton.

The sister had the first watch. Burton had been very feverish and restless during the early hours, but toward midnight he seemed to be sleeping quietly. Annette was at length feeling very sensibly the fatigue and loss of sleep which she had so bravely encountered, but with newly-awakened unselfishness she shrank from calling Charlie, who had scarcely closed his eyes for several nights before.

She determined to watch as long as she could keep herself awake. Burton breathed softly, and no sound was heard in the house.

Annette felt a drowsiness stealing over her, and tried to shake it off, but found that she could not. She rose and walked quietly about the room until her tired limbs refused to support her. She sat down again and tried, by repeating Scripture texts and scraps of poetry, to keep herself awake, but her heavy eyelids fell and she lost consciousness for a moment.

The next instant she was roused by a slight noise, and started up to see a face, pale and ghastly, pressed against a pane of the window that opened on the balcony. It was a strange, frightful-looking face, the eyes seemingly of unnatural size, their glassy staring depths contrasting with the colorless face.

It vanished in a moment, and Annette, now wide awake, tried to re-assure herself and think that it was only the work of her imagination. She sat for an hour with her eyes fixed on the spot with a horrible kind of fascination, hoping and yet fearing to see the appearance again.

About one o'clock Charlie came unsummoned to relieve her, and silently motioned her to go to rest. She hesitated for a moment, thinking it possible that she had seen a burglar, and that she ought to tell Charlie; but fearing to disturb Burton, and half doubting the evidence of her own senses, she stole

away, and going to sleep knew nothing more until morning.

"Lie still, honey, and sleep longer," was the salutation which greeted her on awaking; and Fidelia's kind hands pressed her back on the pillows and tucked the blankets around her. "Mrs. Hicks is going to stay awhile, and Mr. Newman came home this morning and sent word that he would be over presently, so just lie still and get a good rest for to-night."

Annette yielded to the persuasion, and was soon sleeping again. When she rose it was not far from noon, and she felt refreshed and strengthened by her long rest.

"How is Burton?" was her first question. Fidelia hesitated for a moment.

"Burton seems rather feverish, and the doctor was inclined to think that we had been to blame for it; but there hasn't been a soul in his room to-day but Mr. Newman, Mrs. Hicks, Charlie, and myself."

"Did he know Mr. Newman?" asked the sister.

Fidelia silently filled the tea-kettle, as if that operation required her undivided attention.

"Yes," she said, at length, "he knew Mr. Newman, and there's no accounting for sick people's fancies; he seemed to be troubled at sight of him, though he used to be so fond of the old gentleman. He clerked for him in the store for awhile, did he not?"

Annette said she believed he did.

"Poor boy! he seems to think now that Mr. Newman has something against him, and begged him not to have him arrested. We had all we could do to pacify him. Dr. Dalton says we must keep all visitors out of his room for the present. Sit down and eat your dinner, before you go up stairs. You look tired and worn out."

"O, I shall do finely!" answered Annette, with an effort at cheerfulness. "I have had a good long rest and feel much stronger. Is Lucy still better?"

"Still better, and getting a wonderful appetite," answered Fidelia, with undisguised satisfaction. "She asked Mrs. Hicks to bring her something to eat, saying that I was nearly starving her," added the good old woman, laughing and rubbing her hands, while the tears stood in her eyes. "Please Heaven, the dear child will be well enough to take a good meal one of these days. She has had a narrow escape. I don't think the doctor had much hope of her recovery for awhile."

Annette gave a little shiver at the thought of what might have been. She was deeply thoughtful and strong in her resolution to try to redeem the past by her conduct in the future.

Her late aims and pleasures had lost their charms for her while living thus day by day under what seemed to be the shadow of death. If only Burton were out of danger, she could take up her life at

home with joy, devoting her best powers to her own loved ones, and gladly foregoing what had but lately seemed essential to her happiness.

Annette's presence in his room seemed to quiet Burton sometimes, when every thing else failed; and when the doctor called and found her, as he often did, sitting by her brother's bedside in her plain, neatly-fitting dress, holding the patient's hand and soothing him with quiet words, he contrasted her in his thoughts with the bare-shouldered, jeweled young lady whom he had met on the night of the tragedy, and mentally pronounced her now "clothed and in her right mind."

On this morning Annette found her brother in a state of unusual excitement. He clutched her fingers nervously as she laid her hand on his arm, and asked, wildly:

"Where am I going?"

She talked in low tones and tried to soothe him, but he held her hand with a grasp like that of the drowning, and every now and then repeated his question: "Where am I going? Hold me back, I am not ready!" he continued, wildly. "I cannot go yet, there is something I must do. Tell me what it is. Tell me, help me!" he insisted.

Annette's distress was keen; but, striving to suppress her feelings, she at last succeeded in composing the sick boy, and watched him fall asleep, praying, O, how fervently in her heart, that at least he might not

be called away until he should be given time and opportunity for repentance and acceptance of the Saviour of sinners.

When evening came again Burton's fever seemed higher than on the previous one, and Annette insisted upon watching, knowing that he would be more quiet with her than with any one else.

When all the others had retired, and all the house was silent, the occurrence of the night before came up in her mind almost for the first time.

She placed her chair in such a position that she could watch Burton, and also see the spot where the face had appeared at the window.

But it was long before Burton slept, and her attention was given to him, to the exclusion of every other thought. At last, however, the tossing arms became quiet; the flushed face, with its white bandaged forehead that had been rolling from side to side on the pillow, was still; the breathing indicated that the sufferer was asleep.

Then, on consulting the time, her thoughts went back to the face at the window. There was a spice of superstition in her nature, and she presently found her imagination running upon the subject of apparitions. She had lost all faith in modern spiritualism, so-called, but she had yet a lingering credence for what she styled in her thoughts "the regular old-fashioned ghost that walks at night and is wont to frequent old rambling, long-deserted houses."

She had given no thought to such things for a long time, but to-night there came back to her a story which had been told her of the time when the old Rectory was full of life, and the now quiet parlors, chambers, and large unused rooms, furnished school-rooms, refectories, and dormitories for the crowds of boys, large and small, who gathered yearly under the wide-spreading roof. The story was a sad one, of an orphan boy, who had been placed in the institution by his uncle while he went abroad. When the boy entered the school he was well dressed and had plenty of spending money. But the uncle was never heard from again, and Lawrence Russel was at last reduced to the necessity of laboring in the school for his board and tuition. He made fires, swept the rooms, sawed wood, and did other work to which, as his delicate hands showed, he had never before been accustomed. There was nothing degrading in this struggle with circumstances over which he had no control. Some of the noblest workers for God and humanity whom the world has ever known have had their characters rounded and polished by the necessity of brave, unyielding effort in the hand-to-hand struggle with poverty.

But this youth was proud spirited, and rebelled against his lot, especially as many of the pupils treated him contemptuously on account of it. He was deliberately snubbed and put down whenever occasion offered. If he expressed an opinion, it was scornfully

ignored, and whenever any game was planned, they left him out.

He grew morbid and morose, and finally ceased to speak to any one, unless addressed by one of the teachers. To his fellow-students he made no remarks and no responses, and for two full years the other boys never heard his voice except in recitations, although he slept in a room occupied by twenty students.

He was called by some one jeeringly "The Silent Boy." The name came to be used afterward without any thought of ridicule. He applied himself to his books with unsparing devotion, and, on graduating, took the highest honors of his class.

There were those among his fellow-students who had learned to respect him, and some of them congratulated him sincerely on the victory which he had gained. Lawrence bowed silently, but a flush crept over his pale face, up to his forehead, the first sign of feeling he had shown for more than a year.

His close application to his studies, and his unsparing devotion to the work he had undertaken to do for his own support, had long been undermining his health, and the day after commencement found him completely prostrated. It was thought that rest and recreation might restore his strength, but he never left the house afterward, except for a short drive.

"He had the biggest, darkest eyes I ever saw," said Annette's informant; "and as his face grew paler

and thinner day by day, and his eyes grew brighter and more hollow, he looked as one imagines a ghost looks."

The good old rector gave him a private room, and lavished every attention upon him which kindness and skill could give; but it was soon evident that his days were numbered. He seemed in a measure to relent toward those whose ungenerous treatment had embittered his school-life. When the boys went to his room he greeted them with a smile and an outstretched hand, but without a word. His long-observed silence seemed a barrier which he could not pass. And they in turn came and went silently, feeling with keen pain the tacit rebuke which continued to the end.

While we must condemn the morbid sensitiveness that could allow itself to be so incurably wounded, do we not see the deformity of that spirit which cannot refrain from wounding at every opportunity? Do you not think that when those boys looked upon the face of their fellow-pupil in the coffin, their hearts would have been less heavy if they could have remembered that they had done what they could to make his burdens lighter?

Ah, my friends, there comes a time to each when the recollection of unkindness done to another brings a sharp recoil of pain that is even keener than the blow we gave. We involuntarily shrink from the thought of an unkind act or word toward the dead.

Let us not forget, amid the strifes, resentments, and rivalries of earth, that the time will come to all to lie in the awful passivity of death, unoffending, unanswering, unresisting. In anticipation of such a moment, can we not be more forbearing, more forgiving now?

But to return to Annette. The story of "The Silent Boy" kept running through her mind, and the description of the sick student's eyes recalled vividly the strange staring orbs in the white face that had looked through the window.

You have seen that Annette was inclined to be credulous, and perhaps you will not be surprised when I tell you that she fell to wondering whether the appearance which she had seen was not the ghost of "The Silent Boy" come back to haunt the scene of his trials and conquests.

It was nearing the hour when she had seen the face, would it appear again? Burton was sleeping quietly, and she kept her eyes fixed on the window. The hands crept nearer and nearer to the time, and Annette found herself actually trembling with expectation.

A little later she heard a noise outside the door, as of some one trying to walk noiselessly in boots that creaked slightly. She knew it was not Charlie coming, for he always wore slippers in the sick-room; but then, she reflected, a ghost would not be likely to wear creaking boots. It might have been a swinging door somewhere. She was still watching the window

with a seeming fascination which she could not resist. It was now a little past the time for which she had been waiting.

A moment later she heard the creaking sound again, this time just behind her chair. She started and looked around in a frightened way. There was the face she had seen before, but more plainly visible now; yet though a finger was held up warningly, she soon learned that her strange visitor was not "The Silent Boy."

"Pray don't be frightened," he said, in a low tone. "I mean no harm. I came in from the balcony through the anteroom. I felt as if I must see Burt. You know who I am, I suppose."

Annette had, indeed, guessed at his identity from the green glasses, which she now saw were the cause of the strange, staring expression which had so startled her.

"I am Mat Walters," he went on. "It was I who did it. I am not hiding to escape justice. If he dies, I shall give myself up. I shall want them to hang me. I could not bear to live and suffer more than I am suffering now. But I wanted to be free to come here now and then to see if he were living or dying, and what Mr. Newman was likely to do if he recovered. It is all my fault that he took the money, and I want to bear the blame that belongs to me. I know you will believe me and not betray me," he added, beseechingly. Looking at his pale, agonized

features, Annette could not refuse to comply with his wishes.

"If he should die," he shuddered as he spoke, "you will hear that I have been arrested. If he should live, it would be in my power to help him."

He again turned toward the bed.

"We were both drunk and gambling," he said, as if to himself. "Both are to blame, though I am the guiltier of the two; but a heavier weight of blame rests somewhere else. We both learned to drink and play cards at evening parties given by ladies who call themselves *Christians!*"

The young man's lips curled scornfully as they spoke the name which had been thus dishonored. Annette ventured no reply. The visitor stood looking silently at his victim for a few minutes, and then withdrew as silently as he had come.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BACK TO THE OLD HOME.

"Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. . . . Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep."—Psa. xc, 3, 5.

DAY after day passed, and the snow disappeared from the hills and valleys, but the dark clouds still hung above the earth, and the very windows of heaven seemed to stand open. The rain fell for weeks almost without cessation. Umbrellas jostled one another on the streets, and the atmosphere was heavy with moisture.

The swollen brooks and creeks poured out their waters, and still the rain-fall went on. If the time was a gloomy and trying one to those who were in good health, and able, in a measure, to shake off its depressing influences, what must it have been to the occupants of sick chambers, with their narrow range of vision and tiresome routine, added to the mental gloom so generally consequent upon physical indisposition?

It had been many days since Dr. Dalton had begun his visits at the old Rectory on that memorable night. The theater and the infidel reading-room had received

no more visits from Charlie Bell. The ball-room dress which had been exchanged with burning cheeks for more suitable attire on that occasion, and thrown in a crumpled heap into the press, was lying there yet.

Annette had not fallen sick from the exposure which she had incurred then and afterward, but her pale face told of days and nights of sleeplessness and anxiety.

There were still some true friends who came and gave of their time and strength to aid in caring for the sick; and Lucy, contrary to her habit before her illness, welcomed all who came.

"O I am so glad you have come!" she would say, "I was so tired of every thing and every body."

Burton, on the contrary, shrank from visitors, especially his old associates. In the intervals of freedom from fever, when his mind seemed lucid, he spoke to no one unless in reply to questions; but when in the delirium of fever, if any of his former companions entered his room, his agitation was greatly increased.

Matthew Walters frequently came to inquire, while Annette was watching with her brother. He often wished that he might talk with the sufferer, and hear from his lips that he forgave him; but both he and Annette feared the consequences of making his presence known. And so he came and went quietly, while Burton was asleep.

The life of the wounded boy was trembling in the balance, and the miserable one whose hand had thus laid him low was experiencing something of that remorse which doubtless makes no inconsiderable part of the punishment of the lost. He often wished, with unavailing pain, that he had never seen the revolver which he had once prided himself on possessing. He wished that he had never learned the "harmless game," the fascination of which had lured him on and on to the doors of a gambling hell.

He wished that he had never been tempted to taste the burning poison which had fired his brain and made him, in all probability, a murderer.

A murderer at sixteen! How young to die for his crimes! and O, how young to begin a life which, if spared, must lengthen out its slow, sad years ever enfolded as with a funeral pall by the ghastly memory of his sin! How many have wished in futile agony that the instrument of death used in the heat of anger or the insanity of drunkenness had been beyond their reach, till reason had been given time to resume her sway! And while there is no excuse for the insanity of passion or intoxication, the sickening frequency of murder and suicide, together with an appalling array of accidents, calls loudly for a reform of the great evil of the indiscriminate use of fire-arms.

There was a time when the habitual carrying of weapons branded the man as a ruffian and desperado; and would not such a verdict still carry with it much

of truth? Can any man be rightly called a gentleman who goes and comes, ever on the alert for provocation to use his weapons, ever ready at a real or fancied insult or injustice to shed the blood of his fellow-man?

Alas for the heart which knows such an utter absence of the spirit of the Master! We must all meet with more or less of unkind treatment, and though we cannot prevent a rising indignation oftentimes, we can fulfill the injunction: "Be ye angry, and sin not." We can give ourselves time to reflect that a mean and unworthy act must injure the actor far more in the end than the recipient of the injustice.

There is a nobility in forgiveness, a superiority in overlooking insults; but far above this consideration is that of our Saviour's teaching and example:

"But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil." "When he was reviled, reviled not again." "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearer is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

If He, the pure and faultless, the high and holy, could thus suffer in silence, what are we, with all our imperfections, that we should give way to our resentment against our fellow-sinners?

Again it was the silent night-time, and all were asleep, except Annette. A friend had watched on the previous night, and she felt much refreshed by the unbroken rest thus gained. Burton was thought to

be a little better. Mr. Newman had called in the evening, as he did every day. Whatever had been Burton's offense against him, his father's old friend evidently entertained for the boy only the kindest feelings.

He, too, often went to Burton's room while he was asleep, and bent over him with a face full of pity and concern.

Mat Walters had been promised an interview to-night with the one whom he had so deeply injured.

The rain still fell with its monotonous drip, drip, and the sound suggested the slow but steady re-enforcement of the great volume of water, that already rose high in the banks of the river. No serious apprehensions were yet felt, for the rise was very gradual, but there were many who remembered with some uneasiness that a number of the houses at the back part of the town—the old Rectory among the number—were below the level of the embankment.

Still the river had never overflowed its banks within the recollection of the oldest inhabitants, and what has never been we are prone to tell ourselves will never be.

So Annette was not greatly troubled as she listened to the rain and felt a pleasant sense of shelter and protection on such a night. She wondered if Mat would be able to keep the appointment which he had made. Then she wondered whether she were doing right or wrong to allow him to come and go thus

secretly. His pain and penitence were so evidently real that she could not bring herself to inform on him; and what good, she asked herself, could it do the wounded boy to bury the one who had injured him within the walls of a prison?

She had looked for him by the door, but to night he came to the window instead; and when she went near he whispered, hoarsely,

"I cannot come in; I am dripping wet. The boat was on this side, and I was obliged to swim the creek. How is Burt?"

"A little better," answered Annette. "He spoke of you again to-day, and seemed to want you. It may do him good to see you. You will find some of Charlie's clothes in the anteroom. Be as quick as you can; he is about to wake."

The face at the window disappeared, and Annette went back to the bedside.

"What is it that I hear all the time like the rattle of a dice-box?" asked the sick boy, impatiently.

"It is only the rain pattering against the window; you know there are no shutters on that side," answered the sister, soothingly.

Burton rolled his head on the pillow uneasily.

"'Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup,'" repeated Burton. "Miss Maxwell once gave me a card for learning that verse. It means me. The wicked, snares, fire and brimstone,

and a horrible tempest," he repeated, shudderingly, as the wind brought a fresh dash of rain against the panes.

Annette was sorely troubled. She wished that it was Mr. Ford who was in the anteroom shortly to appear at her brother's bedside. She wished she could think of something to say to Burton. She had once been a daily reader of the Bible, and had memorized many passages; but now there seemed to come to her none of the gracious promises and invitations of the Gospel, but only such texts as these:

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."

The patient's fever was rapidly increasing, and Annette began to fear the excitement of Mat's visit should he come in; but he did not come. Whether he was afraid of the effect of his presence on Burt, or whether he feared exposure for himself, the minutes dragged on until it was time for Charlie to relieve Annette, and then she knew that he was gone. She went to sleep to dream that he had been arrested on the balcony, and that she narrowly escaped imprisonment for complicity.

On the following morning the water was found to have risen to the ground floor, and there was no prospect of abatement. Inch by inch it crept upward and still upward, until it had covered all the floors below

stairs, and then it stealthily began to ascend the walls.

Soon came the novel spectacle of boats passing up and down the streets. The cattle crowded together on such rising ground as they could find, and lowed mournfully. The day passed with a slow but sure advance of the dreaded element until it was forced back through the creeks over nearly all the surrounding country. The doctor landed at the door, and made his way by means of a raft to the staircase of the old Rectory.

Annette had sent a request to Mr. Ford to call, if possible. She knew that her poor brother was even more sorely in need of a physician for his soul than for his perishable body, and she felt that the minister of God could point the way to the great Healer more surely than any one else. But when the pastor came Burton seemed to be in a stupor, and unconscious of his presence. Fervent prayer was offered at his bedside, that he might be restored to health, and that his soul might be cleansed in the fountain opened for sin and for all uncleanness. The sufferer gave no sign, by word or motion, that he understood; but the watchful sister saw the tears start from his closed eyelids as Mr. Ford passed out of the room, and the sight awakened joy in her heart.

After he had gone Annette waited in vain, hoping that Burton would rouse up; but he did not speak even when she tried to encourage him to do so. It was

not until late at night that he made any allusion to the visit.

He had seemed unusually restless, turning his head from side to side, as if in great pain. At last he opened his eyes, and, looking fixedly at his sister, said:

"Annette, you need not send for Mr. Ford again on my account. It is too late for me, but O, Nettie, don't wait until you come to die to make your peace with God. Don't wait until you are about to leave this world to prepare to go. I tell you it is a poor time to get ready for such a journey."

Annette burst into a fit of weeping and left the room. O, could it be that Burton was really about to die, and that he must go unprepared? She would have called Fidelia, but, owing to her loss of hearing, she could not understand the sick boy's feeble words. She hurriedly called Charlie, and begged him to go and talk to Burton. Then, going to her room, she threw herself on her bed and wept such bitter tears as she had never known before.

The presence of death is always saddening, but, O! the sorrow that is not without hope, the sorrow for loved ones who have gone home, is a blessed sorrow compared with the poignancy of pain which belongs to a bereavement that is not only sorrow but despair.

When Charlie took Annette's place at Burton's bedside he tried to quiet his brother, but his efforts produced the contrary effect.

"See here, Charlie," he said, in a stronger voice than he had used since his injury, "don't talk to me as if I were a child or a crazy person. I have thought and thought about these things when you all believed me to be asleep. I know what I am talking about as well as you do—better," he added, "for I believe I can see beyond this world. You remember that mamma thought she could before she died; and she was not afraid to meet what was before her. But, O Charlie, it is not so with me! I am horribly afraid to die. I would give the whole world, if I owned it, only to have time to get ready to go."

Charlie tried to speak, but his brother put up his hand.

"Let me talk until I am done," he said. "There is something else. Charlie, old fellow," here his voice trembled, "we have not been just the same brothers to each other that we used to be in the good old times at home, but I have felt more than I seemed sometimes. That is all past; but I want to say to you, Charlie, that you would better cut loose from Gene Lothay, and that class, and give up freethinking and all that. I can tell you it will not help you much when you come to stand where I do. If I die give my watch to Mr. Newman, and tell him I was sorry. He will understand. Now go down to the library and get my writing-desk."

Charlie hesitated.

"Don't be afraid to leave me. I will be perfectly

quiet until you come back. Go and bring the desk, Charlie," he repeated.

The brother left the room and made his way to the stairs, below which the water shone in the light of the swinging lamp, showing that it was still rising. Then it was that the thought first came to him that he could not go into the library.

Most of the contents of the room had been carried up stairs, but the writing-desk, together with some other articles, had been placed on a high shelf. Charlie went down stairs wondering if it were possible to accomplish his purpose by means of the raft. He stepped on it and began to unfasten it from the banister. At that moment there came a sound that, to his startled ears, was like the roar of a cataract. He started to return, but a gust of wind blew out the lamp, and he lost his footing and found himself floundering in the water, with the terrible rush and roar momentarily drawing nearer.

He struggled blindly to regain the stairs, and at last succeeded just as a great swell of water washed through the door-way. Clinging to the banister he struggled up to what he considered a place of safety. At the top of the stairs he met Fidelia and Annette, with white faces, the former carrying a lamp.

"May the good Father preserve us in this crazy old house, at such a time!" she exclaimed, devoutly. "The river has overflowed its banks."

"Who is with Burton?" asked Annette, in a

startled way, as there came to their ears a rumbling crashing sound entirely different from that which had filled them before. It was the falling of a chimney, as they afterward learned.

"No one," answered Charlie; "he sent me to get his writing-desk. Come and stay with him until I change my clothes."

Annette went to the children's room, and Fidelia followed Charlie, as he led the way with the lamp.

Suddenly he started back, almost knocking down his companion, who followed close behind him. What did it mean? Was he dreaming, or was it the impress yet remaining on his sight of the flashing of the light upon the water? No, he could not be mistaken; it was no ocular delusion. A vast sheet of water spread before him, almost at his very feet.

"Part of the house has given away. O, Burton, Burton!" he groaned, in agony.

It was even so. The entire wing in which the brothers' room was situated had disappeared. I will not try to tell of the grief and terror of that awful night—that night of inky darkness and pouring rain. Its disasters were many and varied. There was something like dumb despair at the old Rectory. One of the inmates swept away in the darkness, helpless and despairing, and the angry waters swelling and rising nearer and nearer to those that remained.

Before the tumult and terror prevailing on all sides had somewhat subsided, and Burton Bell's fate

was understood, the wing, with its helpless inmate, must have been borne far away by the irresistible current.

The days passed and the water returned to its place at the fiat of that One who has said: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." The desolation that followed the receding flood needs no description from my pen. Its story has filled the land. Its records are written indelibly in the lives of many. Of those who were called to pass through its deep waters, and of those who, walking in the Master's footsteps, conceived in noble, generous hearts and wrought with lavish hands a ministry that could not fail to link together souls, however widely sundered by place and circumstances —one end of the golden chain held by the chiefest of the Christian graces, Love, the other grasped by deathless Gratitude.

The reeking dampness of the old Rectory began to yield to the influence of the fires that were kept constantly burning. Lucy, who had experienced a relapse, was again improving.

There was now no need for watchers, but the long, dreary nights witnessed many sleepless hours. At first the younger children had been pacified and comforted with the hope that Burton was still alive and would be found and brought home again. But as the days and weeks passed, and communication both by telegraph and mail was restored, the faint hope

which the older ones had tried to grasp had gradually yielded to despair. It was one of the severest trials of that dreadful time to hear Lonnie or Romie say every morning,

"I do hope we shall hear from Burt to-day;" or, "May be Burt will come home to-day."

Charlie and Annette were feeling daily that each new day was at most more than they could bear, as trembling fear merged into awful certainty.

At last the searchers for Burton or his lifeless body found that portion of the old house in which he had been carried away, now empty and dismantled. Ah, who could tell where at that moment was the poor boy who, in view of his mistaken, worse than wasted, past, had said that he was "awfully afraid to die?"

His friends tried earnestly to hope that it might have been with him as with the dying thief on the cross. This thought was the only drop of relief in the cup of their bitter sorrow.

It has been said that the Bible records one instance of conversion in the hour of death, that none who are truly penitent need despair; but only one, that none may be encouraged to defer repentance until that solemn time.

Charlie Bell, in his pain and remorse for his own unfaithfulness as an elder brother, suffered so keenly that it seemed at times as if he would lose his mind. He wandered continually from room to room of the rambling old house, as if in search of something,

often rising at night and opening the door which had led to that part of the house where had been the room occupied by himself and Burton.

How often in the trials and perplexities of life are we brought to see the loving-kindness of our heavenly Father. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."

It seemed very, very dark to these afflicted ones of whom I am telling you. It seemed as if no brightness could ever again illumine their lives; and yet God, in his mercy, was even then preparing for them a ray of light which would render their sorrow at least less lonely, with a greater blessing to follow.

One evening they were seated together around the parlor fire, Annette heroically trying to amuse the younger children, and Charlie brooding silently over the terrible experience which had lately come to them.

The door-bell rang and the little ones roused up and looked expectant, hoping that kind, cheery Mrs. Hicks had come to spend the evening, or that good old Mr. Newman had returned from his protracted absence. But no, a strange-looking gentleman entered, and looked from one to another questioningly for a moment.

"Don't you know me, children?" he asked, at length.

Then Annette sprang up with the eager cry, "O Uncle Tom!"

And then the others welcomed him as cordially. It was a meeting of joy and sadness. It was as if the living had suddenly vanished out of their lives, and one long since dead had come back to them. There was much to tell and to hear. There was the sad, sad story of Burton's fate, and also of his sin; for though they spoke lovingly and tenderly of the missing one, they told it all, even to the discloseure on Annette's part of Mat Walter's confession and remorse.

"I believe that he, too, was lost in the flood, or he would before now have given himself up, since he must have known, from what Burton said that night, that he was going to die," she concluded.

The others might not feel so confident of the genuineness of the young man's repentance; but to Annette there came no shadow of a doubt as to his sincerity. Could she have known that at that very moment he was listening at a window of the room where they were sitting, she might have lost her faith in him.

Uncle Tom talked tenderly of their father's death and present blessedness, and hopefully of the limitless power of God to save even to the uttermost; and then he told them of his own adventures, a story of shipwreck and peril, of enforced delay in coming home, and of repeated fruitless efforts to communicate with them. He told them, too, of a gentle, sweet-voiced lady, whom he wished them to take into their

hearts and to call "Aunt Eleanor," his wife, of whom they had never heard before.

Then came a discussion of the difficulties which had led to their removal from the home which was theirs by the clearest right, as they might have learned had they been less hasty.

They had learned this fact some time before, but having fallen into the whirlpool of the life at Pleasant Hill, they had authorized Mr. Clark to rent the old home, and chose to remain where they were. The thought came with a pang that Burton's death was one result of that impulsive, hasty removal.

"Of course, you must go back at once," continued the uncle. "The house is vacant now, and will be ready for you by the first of next month."

The time was not far off, but no objection was offered. There was comfort in the thought of returning to the old familiar spot and meeting the well remembered faces. There was comfort in the thought of leaving behind them the scene of so much error and so much sorrow. If only Burton were there to go also!

It was late that night before the inmates of the old Rectory retired, and then there was little sleep for any. The joy of Uncle Tom's return, while very genuine, was overshadowed by sorrow. The burden of every heart was, "O, if Burton were only here, too!"

Preparations for return to Plainville went forward

rapidly. The little ones talked gleefully "of going home," and all were glad to go, although there were not a few real friends at Pleasant Hill to whom they would be sorry to say good-bye.

Mr. Ford came to see them often during the remainder of their stay, and the good old doctor, whose grim ways betokened no lack of heart warmth, called almost daily to the last, not professionally, though he usually felt Lucy's pulse and ended by pinching her cheek, "to give it a little color," he explained.

"I congratulate you on your removal," he said, one day. "We call this 'Pleasant Hill,' but I think our late experience would justify a petition that the name be changed to 'Unpleasant Plain.' Why, sir," addressing Uncle Tom, "the whole region is literally reeking with miasma, and I shall have more fever patients on my hands than I shall know what to do with. What do you say to halving the burden with me?"

Uncle Tom, who was also a physician, declined the offer of a share of Dr. Dalton's practice. He wanted to be near his brother's children and try to help them to walk in the better way toward which their feet were now carefully turning.

A few earnest talks with his uncle and Mr. Ford, and a little careful reading of his mother's Bible, had dissipated the last cobwebs of infidelity that lingered in the mind of Charlie Bell. He was now a daily student of the volume which he had heard reviled

so often. He was now sincerely seeking for the truth, instead of being engaged, as formerly, in a search for arguments to disprove it.

The time passed and the day fixed for their return home drew near. There had been no tidings of the lost one. They had not even had the sad privilege of laying his body away to rest, and planting flowers on his grave. And yet, unacknowledged to each other, or indeed even to their own hearts, there had glimmered the faint, faint hope that he might yet come back and go with them.

They had not ceased to mourn their father's death, though they had so sadly wandered from the way which he would have chosen for them; but their hearts were at rest regarding his eternal welfare. Besides, his death was in no way connected with their mistakes and sins, and they felt a degree of reconciliation to the thought of his departure which they could not as yet feel in connection with that of Burton.

But the last day came, the last hour, and the Bells bade good-bye to the home which held for them some pleasant memories, yet more that were full of sadness.

"We will not forget Solon nor White-foot this time," said Lonnie, gleefully, dancing about on the piazza. "Do you know, Uncle Tom, we forgot them when we ran away, and had to go back after them."

"We!" repeated Lucy, laughing, "how many of us went back?"

"Well, Charlie went back, and Burton was sure the sheriff had caught him, he stopped so long," explained the little boy. "And then Burton forgot the road, and we went to such a good old lady's house. I wish we would get lost that way again. I would tell her that the rabbits she gave me died, and may be she would give me another pair. Burt would like to go, if he were here, on account of the fried chicken."

The child prattled on, little knowing what acute pain his words were giving to his older brother and sisters. Every thing was suggestive of the absent one. Every remembered spot along the way was fraught with sadness, too. Burton had been with them when they passed that way before. What he had said and done all came back to them with wonderful vividness. Dr. Bell was obliged to exert himself to his utmost to cheer the minds of his young relatives, and divert them into other channels of thought than those connected with their recent sorrow.

The day was dark and cloudy, and about noon a slow misty rain began to fall. Upon the whole the journey was not a very pleasant one; but as they entered Plainville the clouds uplifted from the west and the sun set in a blaze of glory. The last bright beams lighted up the old house as they drove up, and Aunt Eleanor came out to welcome them.

And then they saw—what did it mean? They could scarcely believe their eyes. Some one in an invalid-chair drawn up very close to the window, some one looking very white and thin, but with the same dark, bright eyes, the same old smile. Could it be Burton?

"O, Uncle Tom!" gasped a chorus of voices. But Uncle Tom was as much mystified as any of them. How they all alighted, how they made their way into the house and met Aunt Eleanor and Burton—for it was indeed he—they never could tell. It was "like a dream when one awaketh."

When there was time and breath for explanation it was all made plain. Burton told them how the miserable boy who had wounded him had, on the night of the catastrophe, been haunting the house, in the hope of being able to learn something of his condition; how he had not been far off when the current carried away that part of the house where the sick-room was; how he had seen, by the light still burning, the helpless situation of the one whom he had injured, and rowing desperately to the swaying, leaning fragment of a house at the mercy of the water, he had, at the risk of his own life, deserted his boat for the perilous place of the one whom he wished to save from death.

He had with great difficulty induced Burton to remain perfectly quiet, and with the first appearance of light had begun a series of calls and signals, long

unavailing, as they were floating through a sparsely settled district. He sometimes saw persons on the hill-sides, but they had no boats and could give no aid.

When at last they were rescued by a boat "manned by two women," as Burton expressed it, he was, as he said, more dead than alive.

The narrator grew eloquent over the heroic devotion and tireless efforts of Mat Walters to make amends for his fault, and the care and kindness which he had received in the humble home where his lot had fallen.

"Mat found out that you were coming back, and it was he who brought me here on yesterday," he said. "He has given up drinking and gambling, and is honestly trying to seek the right way. He has gone to his home in the country, and, of course, he will be left in peace. No one should think of trying to have him arrested for the part which he took on that miserable night."

"I assure you I was as much to blame as he, and I owe it to him that I am alive to-day."

He paused a moment and then added, softly:

"And O, I found the way of peace in that roadside cabin. I found the Saviour whom I had slighted so long. I am glad to be alive, but I am no longer afraid to die."

A few days later who should make his appearance at Plainville but Mr. Newman. He had a long pri-

vate interview with Burton, from which he came without the watch which had been sent to him, and wiping his eyes vigorously while he muttered to himself:

"Bless the boy! he is his father's own son, after all."

My reader, need I dwell longer on this part of my story? Need I try to give you a picture of the peace and joy of the boys and girls of my story, of their happiness in the old-new life upon which they have now entered? It will have its trials and sorrows, for earth no longer knows a spot called Paradise, but having tried the paths that lead to stumbling on the dark mountains, they have verified the promise:

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

O, Saviour, thou who here below
  Didst tread the one right way,
Leaving thy foot-prints on the earth,
  That none need go astray,
Incline our hearts to follow thee,
  To walk where thou hast trod,
To choose, in darkness as in light,
  The way that leads to God.

We know that sin's sad heights are reached
  By flowery paths and fair;
That oft the bright, alluring road
  Leads down to dark despair.

O let us never seek to tread
The highway smooth and broad,
But choose, in darkness or in light,
The way that leads to God.

Send out thy light, thy truth to guide,
Subdue our stubborn will;
From death's dark mountains turn our feet
Unto thy holy hill.
Thou art the Life, the Truth, the Way,
O let thy staff and rod
Mark all the journey, dark or bright,
The way that leads to God.

THE END.

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